

GLORIFYING GOD IN ALL MY DECISIONS: DEALING WITH THE WORLD IN MY DECISIONS

Brian Trainer
I Corinthians 8-10

Midwest College & Career Retreat
May 25-26, 2012

The Challenge of the Christian Life

- “Against the world — for the world” tension (C. S. Lewis)
- Isolation vs. Assimilation (contextualization = sneaking the gospel in so that they respond, “Wow, I would never have guessed you were a Christian.”)
- Individual Personal Liberty vs. Christian Community Sensitivity

A Biblical Paradigm for Decision Making

- Biblical Commands — are there specific Biblical injunctions that address my decision?
- Biblical Principles — what are the Biblical principles that impact my decision?
- Biblical Examples — are there Biblical examples, either good or bad, from which I can learn?
- Character of God — what attributes of God should be modeled as I make this decision?

The Corinthian Situation — A “Debatable Issue” (an area in which there is no direct Scriptural instruction)

- What are the questions?
 - 8:1 - *Can I go to an idolatrous feast in the temple and eat the meat?* - notice their logic:
 - 8:4-6 - One God, no “gods” behind the idols [mature believers recognize that stones are stones, and that there are no such things as a real “other” God or a living idol]
 - 8:8 - One tasty steak that God made [food doesn’t commend you to God]
 - 10:23 - Therefore, “all things are lawful unto me.”
 - 10:25 - *Can I eat the meat if it is sold in the marketplace?* [Note: In essence, they are asking, “Does 4 feet make a difference?” for the marketplace was just outside the temple wall.]
 - 10:27 - *Can I eat the meat if it is served in an unbeliever’s home?*
- Three cautions when addressing debatable issues
 - *Debatable issues are not answered simply* (73 verses - In this epistle, Paul takes a ton less space dealing with way more important issues.)
 - Chapter 8 - Extended Explanation
 - Chapter 9 - Extended Personal Illustration
 - Chapter 10 - Historical Illustration (vv. 1-15); Further Explanation (vv. 16-24); Final Application (vv. 25-33)
 - *Key Idea:* Paul’s goal is not just right action; it’s right thinking!

- *Debatable issues are not answered absolutely (10:20-30).*
 - Answer to first question: NO! (vv. 20-21)
 - Answer to second question: YES! (vv. 25-26)
 - Answer to third question: MAYBE! (vv. 27-28) If he's acknowledging that the food came from his god, you must push it away in order to demonstrate your disagreement and faith in God alone. God alone deserves credit for that meat, and you must not condone another's credit.
 - *Key question:* Why is Paul flip-flopping on his answers? What contributes to Paul's position? The answer is in the Old Testament illustrations he uses (10:1-13).
 - Five privileges — "all" enjoyed
 - Five failures — "most" died (all but 2 people)
 - One point — Do not think that your spiritual position or heritage can protect you from the dangers of desiring things that could result in spiritual suicide.
 - Illustration 1 (v. 6) - Numbers 11:4-10
 - What was the moral character of the things the people desired? They are morally neutral items.
 - What made these things "evil"? They were associated with Egypt-like living.
 - *Key Principle:* Morally neutral things can be characterized as evil via their association with the world.
 - 4 More Illustrations
- *Debatable issues should be answered arrogantly (9:1ff, esp vv. 25-27).*
 - The determining factor is not your knowledge.
 - The determining factor is not your rights.
 - The determining factor is not your "ability to handle it."
 - The determining factor is not whether you like it.
 - The determining factor is not whether it "works."
- Why was this such a big issue to the Corinthians? "Paul's conclusions would cause the Corinthians to be considered outlandish, antisocial, perverse, and outcasts" (paraphrase). Because the Corinthians do not want to be considered social outcasts, they argue that their reason and rights are enough to tip the scale in favor of eating what and where they desire.
- Why is this an important issue to Paul? "Paul's Principles in Decision Making."
 - *Encroachment* — Will it go against the demands of my conscience? (8:7) INTERNAL Your conscience should be your guide, but it should also be continuously informed and developed by the Word of God. We will not all be the same in this area.
 - *Example* — Will it set a helpful pattern for others to follow? (8:10-13) EXTERNAL We cannot entrap another believer. The passage is not saying that the conscience of every other believer becomes my guide. I must simply not entrap them! In saying that "he'll never eat meat again" in verse 13, doesn't mean in every context, because later on he will encourage the Corinthians to eat meat.
 - *Excess* — Will it slow me down in the race? (9:24-27)
 - *Excuse* — Will it be a covering for my sin? (10:19-21) We do something questionable as an excuse for not standing up for Christ...in other words, we don't want to stand up for Christ, so we just go ahead and do something that we're not sure about.

- *Expedience* — Will it be to my spiritual advantage? (10:23) This is asking how it will help me, not will it hurt me.
 - *Edification* — Will it build me up? (10:23)
 - *Exaltation* — Will it glorify or give the right opinion of God? (10:31)
 - *Evangelism* — Will it lead others to Christ? (9:17-23; 10:33)
 - *Emulation* — Will it be like Christ? (11:1)
 - *Enslavement* — Will it bring me into bondage? (6:12)
- Why is this important to us?
 - *Key principle*: Believers seeking to glorify God should never associate themselves with elements that are linked to the world system regardless of the reasons, my personal rights, or the perceived costs. [“Worldliness”: Anything internal in the heart that seeks to be independent from God. It is primarily internal (hence, Christ regularly referred to the Pharisees as worldly), and not dominated by externals.] Do you have the ability to know what is associated with the world system? *It changes every year, because the world is constantly changing.*
 - The proper model
 - *Common Model*: Evangelism leads to exaltation — how can we interact with as many people as possible?
 - *Paul’s Model*: Exaltation leads to evangelism — how can we reflect the pure character of God to as many people as possible?
 - Include God in the decision-making process, since He has ownership (“Lord/Master”) over everything that is involved in your life (i.e., what you eat, what you wear, what you listen to, what you watch/look at, what you do, where you go, what you do with your life, whether or not you marry, etc.):
 - *Personal Life*
 - Never ask the question, “Why can’t I do it?”
 - Always ask, “What would God want me to do?”
 - *Interpersonal Life*
 - Always be willing to graciously allow a fellow believer the freedom to make personal choices in debatable issues without a spirit of criticism.
 - *Ministry Life*
 - Never ask, “How much of the world can I borrow to make a ministry appealing to unbelievers?”
 - Always ask, “How much of the glory of God can I display to make ministry awe inspiring to unbelievers?”
 - Will you include God in your decision-making processes? Will you allow God to take and crush your life, so that you can bear fruit? Cf. John 12:24-25 — Before you have a fruitful life, you must have a selfless death. God says, “No excuses, no reason, no rights, no perception of cost. I want it all! Jump in my hand and let me crush you, and you will bring forth fruit.”