

Temptation and Sin

Week 10 in Our Weekly Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Orchard Park Wesleyan Church

Week of November 11, 2018

Introduction

1 Corinthians 10 is really a continuation of the conversational topic that began in chapter 8—whether or not it was acceptable to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. We have already studied the portion of Paul's response in which he focused on the deeper issue of loving others (specifically, other believers) so much that we would be willing to give up our rights in order that they would be built up and strengthened in their faith. We saw last week that Paul took this approach to heart in his own life—not just for fellow, weaker believers—but in order to present the Gospel without any kind of hindrance to unbelievers.

Now, as he continues his response to the Corinthian believers, Paul moves to another deeper issue than that of just "eating meat." He addresses the issue of sin, specifically as it relates to idolatry *in the believer's life*. Paul is not talking to unbelievers in this letter; he is specifically responding to the Corinthian church's questions concerning eating meat offered to idols.

During the first part of this week, we're going to spend some time studying temptation and sin—what it is, our propensity for it, and how we stand against it. It may sound strange, but I am really looking forward to this part of our study. God's Word says a great deal about sin. We all struggle with it and sometimes fall to it—and unless we understand what God says about it and how He intends for us to handle it, we won't be well equipped to reign over it.

May God fortify our hearts this week.

Day 1

Again and Again

“These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age..”

1 Corinthians 10:11

We left off last week with Paul exhorting the Corinthian church to run their race with purpose. He talked about disciplining himself so that he would live out what he preached to others. Were it not for the chapter break and heading that we have in our Bibles now, the text would flow into chapter 10 in perfect continuity from the topic at the end of chapter 9. In order to run the race to win and to live purposefully obedient lives, we can't forget our spiritual ancestors.

Please read 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.

- List the amazing events in which all of our spiritual ancestors participated:

- What/Who was the “spiritual rock that traveled with them” (v. 4)?

Although Paul is talking to a primarily Gentile church, he makes sure to refer to the ancient Israelites as their ancestors, too. This might seem second-nature to us now, but it's an important relationship to recognize and remember. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we are “grafted in” among the original branches of God's tree (Rom. 11:17). We are no less and no more God's people than the Israelites were and still are. Such a reminder allows for our inclusion in God's promise, and it also necessitates that we learn from the past sins of our spiritual ancestors. As Paul says, they were written down for us as an example so that we don't follow suit.

The first thing we're going to discuss is basic but profound: all of those who fell to sin in the wilderness were part of God's chosen people, and they all followed Christ. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, that they all “were guided by a cloud...walked through the sea...were baptized as followers of Moses...ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual water.” That water came from the “spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ.” So, this was an active relationship in which all walked with

Christ—under His presence, protection, and provision. This should impact *us* as active followers of Christ now. All the sins that the Israelites committed against God were done by a people who literally followed Christ, were engaged in an active, loving relationship with Him, and experienced His care and provision like no one had seen before.

- What did the Israelites do that caused God not to be pleased with them?

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The list you made above contains some things that we would readily call serious sins: idolatry and sexual immorality. But it also contains things like desiring evil things, putting Christ to the test, and grumbling. We tend to want to classify certain sins as more serious than others—

those sins that we probably think we could never commit. At first, I was inclined to condemn “putting Christ to the test” as something I would never do. But when I looked back at the incident in Exodus 17, Israel’s sin of testing Christ stemmed from simply doubting God’s intentions and provision because of the physical evidence around them that challenged their faith. Who among us has never struggled with doubt when everything we *see* seems contrary to what He *says*?

Romans 6:23 says that “the wages of sin is death,” and as we read in 1 Corinthians 10, all of the sins that were committed in the wilderness led to death for the Israelites. (Making and worshipping the golden calf would have resulted in the death of the entire nation, but God relented because of Moses’ plea with Him in Exodus 32.) *All* sin is serious to God because, as we’ll study more on Day 4 this week, all sin results from a refusal to acknowledge God for who He is and to somehow replace Him with something or someone else. We’re working a little backwards in that we’re going to discuss that basic element of sin on Day 4 rather than at the beginning of our study today. For the remainder of today, though, I’d like to take what we’ve learned already and concentrate on it all in light of 1 Corinthians 10:12 and the following passages of scripture.

Please read Exodus 24 and Exodus 32:1-6.

In Exodus 19, God met with all Israel at Mount Sinai. The people trembled, and the mountain shook from God’s glory as He descended in fire and wrapped the mountain in smoke. The blast of a trumpet, peals of thunder, and bolts of lightning terrified the people at the foot of the mountain, and they knew they were

in the presence of the Almighty. They were so afraid that they asked Moses to speak to God for them because they thought they would die from the sound of God's voice and the presence of His glory.

In chapter 24, God concluded giving Moses His laws for the people. Moses relayed everything God commanded to the Israelites, and they responded in unison, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded." Moses built an altar for sacrifice and consecrated the people with some of the sacrificial blood; then, he, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 elders went up the mountain and ate at the feet of God to confirm the Lord's covenant with Israel.

All Israel beheld the awesome and terrifying reality of the glory of God; Moses, Aaron, and a few others ate in God's very presence. There was no mistaking the reality of the One whom they followed and promised to obey. Yet in Exodus 32, just 40 days after such a display, the Israelites begged Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship—and Aaron did.

When I consider these events, I am first overwhelmed by the descriptions of God's glory. However great our estimation of the Most High, it is not enough. His presence causes mountains to tremble, and His voice makes the hearer beg that it stop. Yet those who witnessed these physical displays of God's glory—some who even sat on a sapphire floor and ate at His feet—broke the promise they unanimously made to Him and turned their worship elsewhere. This is what Paul wanted the Corinthian church—and now us—to understand.

Some of the Corinthian believers persistently claimed freedom in Christ to pursue what they pleased. Some of them justified it by claiming that they were strong believers. *That's not enough*, is essentially what Paul says as he approaches the end of this conversation continued from chapter 8. Who was more personally accompanied, cared for, and protected by the Lord than the Israelites as they made their way through the desert? Who experienced the reality of God's glory like they did? Following Christ, knowing Him, and living in intimate relationship with Him are essential for us. These pursuits help shape our hearts and our desires, but they do not *guarantee* that we will not stray into sin. We must know the battle we're in and choose to fight it with every weapon God gives us. We must guard our hearts and protect ourselves from dangerous influence, as we'll see Paul tell the Corinthians in 10:14-22. Loving God and following Him are critical to our salvation and to our spiritual growth and maturation—but in order to live holy and obedient lives and to experience an unhindered relationship with Him, we also must be smart, vigilant, and "take heed." We'll continue in this direction tomorrow.

Consider what you've studied today. How does this affect the way you think about your walk with Christ and the choices you make?

Pray: Thank God that He "is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault" (Jude 24). Ask Him to guard your heart and your actions as you grow in relationship with Him.

Day 2

Refined Like Gold

“These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.”

1 Peter 1:7

We’re staying in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 for another day. Though we won’t pick apart the verses, they will serve as the catalyst that launches the rest of our study today. If you’d like to, take a moment to review the passage.

As we studied yesterday, 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 is a necessary reminder that we all have a propensity for sin; no one is exempt from it. Today may not seem like an encouraging message, but I pray that it will be insightful. And I promise that we will get to the other side of this study to see how God protects and provides for us in the face of temptation. We *are* more than conquerors, but we need to spend a little time studying that which we fight against.

Please read James 1:12-15, 1 Peter 1:6-7 and 4:12-19.

All three of these sections of scripture talk about trials and testing. If you’re like me, you probably associate the word “trial” with some sort of circumstantial difficulty or calamity that you’ll have to endure in order to grow your faith. We’re not wrong, but we are only partially correct. In fact, James 1:12-15 specifically talks about temptation as one type of trial, and if we look at the original Greek used in all three of these passages, we’ll see that that’s entirely correct.

A *peirasmois* or *peirasmon* (both derived from the root verb, *peirazó* and used in all three scriptures we just read) is “an experiment, a trial, temptation,” and “both senses can apply simultaneously.” In other words, when we undergo “fiery trials,” they are tests, and sometimes temptation is the means of that test. So when we read that we’ll have to endure trials in life—that we may suffer for being a Christian—we have to remember that suffering through temptation is an inevitable part of this. We can’t count suffering through temptation as lesser than other trials; we can’t let ourselves think that the temptation itself is the sin and feel defeated or guilty in simply being tempted. Remember, even Jesus was tempted—and if it wasn’t somehow difficult to resist that temptation, then it wasn’t temptation at all. Even temptation serves a purpose. It’s up to us *which* purpose it serves. We’ll get to this in a moment.

Before we get too far, let’s remember that God never *gives* the temptation (James 1:13); to do so would entirely contradict His nature. So where *does* temptation come from?

James 1:12-15 gives us the root of the answer. We are tempted when our own desires lure us away from God's standards. But, as this will surely happen to all of us (Matt. 18:7), God *uses* such temptations for our refinement. He is always concerned about the depths of our hearts—even the hidden places that we'd like to pretend aren't there. Since temptation arises from our desires, it brings impurity from the deepest parts of our hearts to the surface, and then God can clean it away. If we will stand strong, endure, and *let* God refine us through these "fiery trials," our faith will be strengthened and purified like gold.

- What does James 1:12 say that we will we earn when we endure such testing?
- Why does 1 Peter 4:13 say that we should be glad when we share in Christ's suffering?

God promises that He will bring good out of that which is meant for evil. For those who withstand the heat of temptation, God promises the crown of life and that someday, since we have shared with Christ in suffering, we'll also share in His glory when we see Him fully revealed at the end.

I mentioned above that temptation will always serve a purpose, and that it is up to us to decide which purpose it will serve. We already discussed that temptation arises from our own desires. We also established that temptation never comes *from* God but that it can be used *by* God. So if we fully cooperate with God and stand firm through temptation, we let God accomplish His good purpose. But what if we don't withstand? What if we don't do what James 1:4 tells us to do and "*let* it [endurance] grow?" What if we give in? Then we allow temptation to serve the purpose of our enemy: to destroy us and our influence. (I am not saying that He can destroy us since we already belong to God; but that is most certainly his aim.) Although temptation is rooted in our own desires, it can also be utilized and weaponized against us by our adversary.

We could spend days studying spiritual warfare, and we would have so much more to learn. So for our study today, we're just going to graze the surface of an otherwise massive topic in an effort to learn how it specifically relates to temptation and sin. This can be a little tricky, too, as I'm reminded of the old phrase, "The devil made me do it!" Don't worry; that's not going to be our position! We are responsible for our own choices, and sometimes temptation comes to us simply because we're human and we have desires that we want to realize in ways that deviate from God's way. That being said and properly understood, we do have to open our eyes to the reality of spiritual warfare because, whether we realize it or not, it's real; it's intense; and it's aimed at us.

We are God's most prized creation—His final masterpiece on the sixth day, created for His own pleasure and glory. Satan, who chose to rebel against God and tried to rise above His throne, hates what God cherishes (us) and has tried to corrupt it from the beginning. He also knows

that his ultimate end comes from Christ Jesus—God the Son, born into humanity to redeem the world and forever defeat the devil. Satan's anger seethes at the thought that he will be defeated by One like the Son of Man, and so he has tried and continues to try—in utter futility—to thwart what God has ordained for his end.

Look up the following, and write down the title used for Satan in each verse (depending on your translation, you may have to glance at the footnotes):

- **Matthew 4:3**
- **1 Thessalonians 3:5**
- **Zechariah 3:1**
- **Job 1:6**

Revelation 12:10 says that Satan stands before the throne of God accusing God's people "day and night." From the verses we looked up above, I think we are safe to say that the accuser of our souls uses temptation in an effort to trap us in sin so that he can use our failures to fuel his accusations before the throne of heaven.

Thankfully, we have already been acquitted; there is no accusation that holds water against us in light of the Cross. But this intention still makes me angry; it makes me want to thwart every one of Satan's efforts by standing firm against temptation. But standing firm takes more than just righteous anger and defiance. 1 Peter 5:7 says that our adversary prowls around like a lion stalking his prey, just looking for someone to devour; in Job 1:7, Satan said that he had been "patrolling" the whole earth, watching all that was happening. The temptations that he throws at us are not shots in the dark; they're specially crafted with the highest likelihood that they will work. He knows many of our desires, weaknesses, and propensities. Unless we're aware of his strategy; unless we watch and stand firm in Christ; we can't expect to withstand trials and temptations in such a way that allow God's purposes of refinement to take their full effect.

God can take any temptation and use it in glorious ways; the choice is ours whether or not we let Him. Tomorrow, we're going to study *how* we let Him.

Consider: How have you typically viewed temptation? Have you considered it a trial that has the potential to refine you? Have you dismissed it as unimportant or somehow "below" other trials? Have you ignored it and hoped it would just go away? Have you felt guilty and trapped by temptation without even giving in to sin? How can our conversation today encourage you to face temptation and hand it over to God for your growth and refinement?

Pray: Thank God that He can turn anything meant for evil into good for you. Cling to Him in prayer if you are suffering through temptation now. Commit yourself to Him, and ask Him to enable you to withstand so that you can experience the full refinement He has for you.

Day 3

No Temptation Except that Which is Common

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

1 Corinthians 10:13

I promised we'd get to the other side of our conversation on temptation and sin so that we can find encouragement to overcome in God's Word. Here we are! Our verse for today, above, gives us the entire framework for our study today. Paul says so much in just this one verse. Let's dig right in.

- List three encouraging assertions in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that help us overcome temptation.

We are not alone. No matter what we feel; no matter what we want to do; no matter how hard the temptation or depraved the desire; we're not alone. Someone—and from what Paul says, *many* someones—has shared our struggle. Somehow, that knowledge brings comfort, doesn't it? God knows we need community for support and that isolation can cause us to plummet even further. So He, in His mercy, doesn't allow any temptation for which we can't find help in community with each other. And in His tenderness toward us, God even provides another shoulder to lean on when it comes to our struggle with temptation.

Please read Matthew 4:1-11.

Before Christ began His ministry, He, too, had to be tested. Notice that the Holy Spirit was the one who led Jesus into the wilderness for

the express purpose of being tempted or tested by the devil. Again, God does not tempt, but He allowed His own Son to be tested before He began His holy work. The same is often true for us. God allows testing and temptation for the refinement of our faith so that, as He calls us into an area of work for His Kingdom, we will have been purified and strengthened in such a way that we can complete the tasks He'll ask us to do.

- Fill in the blanks for Hebrews 4:15.

“This High Priest of ours _____ our weaknesses, for he faced _____ of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.”

I often tend to think that Jesus was tempted in the desert, and that was it. But while still alive in His earthly, unglorified body, that would hardly be the case. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Christ faced *all* of the same testings we do. That He can sympathize with us and really *understand* the struggles we face in our humanity is something that every one of us can cling to as we struggle with our own temptations. Jesus *knows*. He knows because He’s been there. He struggled; He overcame; and now He sits at the Father’s right hand and prays for us when we struggle. Amen.

God makes sure we can handle the temptation first. Doesn’t this just thrill you?! Many of us have heard this before—that God won’t allow us to be tempted beyond what we can stand—but when we really pause to think about it, this is huge. God knows us so well; He considers our current spiritual, emotional, and physical state; and He only chooses to allow a temptation that He *knows* we can overcome. Your victory is already won! Not only has Christ won it forever, but for each specific temptation, God knows you can do it! And don’t think He and all of heaven aren’t cheering you on.

God provides a way out. Part of your victory over temptation comes because God Himself will always provide a way for you to handle your situation without sin. He has your escape route designed and in mind. But how do we know what it is? The only way we can ever discern God’s will and way is to search His Word and seek Him in prayer. So let’s search His Word together again now.

Please read Luke 22:39-46 and 1 Peter 5:8-11.

Though each individual situation will be different, these portions of Luke and 1 Peter provide a general framework for us in how we find a way out of temptation.

1. **PRAY.** One of the mightiest defenses we have against temptation is prayer. When Christ entered the Garden of Gethsemane to pray before He was arrested, He entreated His disciples to pray at least twice with the expressed purpose, “so that you will not give in to temptation” (Luke 22:40). This should be our first line of defense and a constant source of strength for us. When we’re in trouble, we pray for help!

2. **Stay alert.** We talked about Satan’s schemes a little yesterday. In order to withstand what he intends for our harm, we have to be alert and aware of his strategy and our own weaknesses. I’ll say it again this week, but reflection and self assessment are important things for each of us. This is how we know ourselves, anticipate attacks, and seek to fortify those areas of weakness.

3. **Stand firm, and be strong.** This may be the hardest part; it's certainly what makes us weary. But as we studied a few weeks ago, God gives us His strength and His weapons to fight against the enemy (Ephesians 6:10-20). God will uphold us—and as we'll see in a few minutes, even strengthen us—as we stand firm and resist the enemy.

4. **Remember that our struggle is temporary and that we're not alone.** We already talked about not being alone in temptation. I love the reminder here in 1 Peter that whatever struggle we face *will* end. Though we don't know when, and sometimes "a little while" can feel like a long while, God will deliver us out of our suffering. In this particular case, He will bring an end to the temptation. And when He does, we'll be more like His Son.

There is one last thing I want to draw your attention to as it pertains to temptation—and that is God's grace in strengthening us during and after our suffering.

- What does 1 Peter 5:10 say that God will do "after a little while?"

If you'll notice, in the accounts of Christ's temptation in the desert and His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane—two instances of trial and testing—God sent an angel to strengthen our Savior. 1 Peter 5:10 says that He'll strengthen us, too. Our Heavenly Father knows our frailty, and He loves us. Although He allows us to struggle in order to build up our faith, He is a good Father, and He will run to our side when we've come through temptation. He will strengthen us Himself, tending to the needs of His victorious-but-weary child.

Consider: Our God allows temptation for our growth, and He

doesn't ask us to figure out how to overcome it on our own. He provides other people to encourage us, His own compassion to carry us, His strength and weapons for our use, a plan for victory, and renewal when all is done.

Pray: Thank God that He always seeks your good. Thank Him that He has a plan to bring you through trial and temptation. Thank Him that He tends to your needs during and after. Ask Him to strengthen you now in whatever you face.

Day 4

United with Christ...and NO Other

“What? Do we dare to rouse the Lord’s jealousy? Do you think we are stronger than he is?”

1 Corinthians 10:22

As we approach 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 today, we might wonder how it applies to us in our current culture; we don’t have much acquaintance with idol worship in the United States. But, I think we’ll see in our study today that, although we’ve done away with the statues, we have plenty to learn from this portion of Paul’s letter.

Please read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22.

- What are we doing when we drink from the cup and eat the bread (particularly, sharing one loaf)?

- What did eating the sacrifices at the altar do for Israel?

Paul points out that something very important happens when we partake of a sacrificial or sacramental meal: a sharing that is so deep that it results in a union. We unite with Christ by sharing His blood and His body, and we unite with other believers who partake with us. This is the basis for why Paul tells the Corinthian church that they must not eat meat that has been offered to idols.

You’ll remember that Paul didn’t condemn this right away in chapter 8; he addressed a few deeper heart issues first. But when he specifically addresses the act of sharing in these meals (likely in a temple setting), Paul bluntly tells the Corinthian believers that to join in on such a practice is to position themselves in direct association with demons. Just as they united with each other and with Christ in Old Testament sacrifices and New Testament Communion, so they would also be uniting with unbelievers and with the demonic entities that were present in pagan ceremonies.

In light of our brief discussion of spiritual warfare yesterday, I can’t help but feel the weight of Paul’s

assertion! How we sometimes forget that the invisible is just as real as the visible. And how we forget that anything that is opposed to God reeks of the enemy's presence.

- Why do you think Paul ends this paragraph with a question about provoking the Lord to jealousy?

Please read Romans 1:18-33 and re-read or remember Exodus 32:1-6 from Day 1.

Although some of the Corinthians thought they were spiritually strong enough to participate in temple feasts, Paul argued that such participation not only joined them with demonic activity, but it also threatened to provoke the Lord's jealousy because the sin of idolatry was a real danger. I think we can pinpoint two main reasons for his statement and concern:

Idolatry is not always obvious. This is the case as we see it with the Corinthian believers, in ancient Israel, and even in our own culture. This is what Paul explains in Romans 1, and it is why he points out the spiritual forces that operate behind a seemingly harmless social event in 1 Corinthians 10.

Idolatry is anything that steals our heart from God. We've talked at length about our relationship to Christ as His bride. That helps us understand the severity of idolatry in a more tangible way. It is essentially spiritual adultery. Once we've allowed another person or object to compete with God for the affections of our heart, we've broken our vows to Him as our One and Only—just like the Israelites did at Mount Sinai.

Notice that the Israelites didn't renounce God and abandon Him altogether. When Aaron made the calf and called it the Israelites' "gods," he was intermingling the manmade image with the real God, displaying the sort of confusion we see in Romans 1:21. The Israelites worshipped the image but planned a feast to the LORD the following day. A snare of idolatry is that it doesn't always perform an immediate takeover; instead, it creeps in alongside God as something innocent—almost like Him, something or someone that represents Him. Then, confusion begins, and we can't separate one from the other. We begin to transfer our affection to the representation of God instead of to the invisible, everlasting, almighty, *Only* God.

Though we don't worship golden images and may think ourselves better off than the Israelites, the human heart is prone to wander and to replace God with anything that looks like it might meet our need for Him. Whether it be self-focus, other-focus, or object-adoration, idolatry is still something against which we must guard. Assessing our priorities—where we spend the majority of our time and what we think about most—is an important practice to help us catch ourselves before we wander. Committing to a time of prayer and reading God's Word helps position us in a humble, worshipful posture on a regular basis. In short, we need to *seek* first to *put* God first.

Idolatry is the root of all other sin. God planted evidence of Himself throughout creation *since* creation. In fact, Romans 1:20 says that through God’s creation, people can “clearly see” who He is—that they have “no excuse—”but rather that humanity chooses to deny God’s authority and pursue their own wisdom. The result? We have tried to replace God with every kind of imaginable substitution—including our own wisdom—and because of our insistence, God let us do it. From that initial act of rebellion comes every other detestable behavior. A heart without God ruling over it falls to selfish depravity every time.

Paul knew the dangers of idolatry, and he knew the surreptitious nature of it. Because the Corinthians tended to think themselves so strong, so wise, so liberated that they could partake with unbelievers in pagan meals, they needed a strong reminder and warning. Sometimes we need the same. Yes, we are free; other “gods” are nothing. But we are to be joined and united *only* with Christ—nothing else. To allow ourselves freedom without discernment is to expose ourselves to unnecessary danger.

Consider: Is God at the center of your heart, life, and worship now? Do you make it your priority to seek Him and abide in Him alone? How? What other people, events, or things compete for your focus?

Pray: Thank God that He is jealous for your heart. He knows that He alone can guard it and keep it for righteousness and purity. Ask Him to give you more of a desire for Him and to help you as you love Him alone with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Day 5

Setting an Example

“And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.”

1 Corinthians 11:1

Now that Paul has dealt with the issues of love (chapter 8), giving up our rights for the sake of the Gospel (chapter 9), and idolatry (chapter 10), he chooses to change his tone a little as he wraps up the conversation about eating meat offered to idols.

Let’s start by reading 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 (in some translations, 11:1 is actually 10:34).

- What is Paul’s advice about eating meat that may have been sacrificed to idols when it is outside the context of a pagan feast (i.e., in the marketplace or at someone’s home)?
- What should be the deciding factors in such situations (vv. 23, 24, 31)?

The responsibility of the mature believer. I love a good superhero movie, and I’m often amazed by the way they echo truth found in scripture. I can’t help but think of that classic line from *Spiderman*, “With great power comes great responsibility,” in response to today’s portion of 1 Corinthians. The mature believer has peace with God, freedom in Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, with all of these privileges, we bear the responsibility for protecting the consciences of others and helping to build up their faith. Everything we do—all questionable decisions that may not be laid out as black-and-white concepts in scripture—should be help up against this backdrop.

In verse 23, Paul brings out that Corinthian saying again, “I am allowed to do anything,” and reminds them that “allowed” is not synonymous with “good” or “beneficial.” Paul confirms that eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols and then sold in the marketplace is fine. Don’t even question it, he says—because it doesn’t matter. God made the animal; eat the meat! However, if someone—particularly an unbeliever—invites you to dinner and then feels compelled to tell you that you’re eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, that’s different. In that case, the issue is no longer about meat or idols; it is about the conscience of the person serving you and telling you the origin of the meat. Is an unbeliever testing your values? Is that person concerned for *your* conscience? Is a weaker believer looking to your reaction as an indication of whether what they’re doing is wrong? All of these possibilities were real, and each one would necessitate that the believer abstain from eating that meat because the salvation of the unbeliever or the conscience of a weaker believer was at stake. With spiritual maturity and privilege comes a responsibility to nurture the spiritual formation of others.

Doing all for the glory of God. I so often associate this verse with the work that we do. While that’s not wrong, I love the context in which it is actually set here. First, it reminds us that no matter how basic an action is, it can be used to help others see the magnificent glory of God. By upholding and being sensitive to the values of others, we show them God’s love; by giving up our rights and freedoms in Christ for the sake of others’ consciences, we point them to Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf; by using our maturity in relationship with Jesus to serve the needs of others, we emulate the Servant Himself. Everything we do—even eating and drinking—can point someone to Jesus and result in eternal salvation. Praise God! He allows us to participate in *His* work even in our most mundane.

What would Jesus do? This question has been proclaimed to an exhaustive degree in our culture, but that doesn’t minimize its importance. Our purpose on this earth is to reflect Christ to a lost world. If we think we’re mature believers, we ought to be ever-conscious of our image as that in a mirror reflecting our King. So Paul sums it up for the Corinthian believers by saying, *When you’re faced with a tough decision that could affect the spiritual condition of others, imitate me and sacrifice your freedom on their behalf because I’m imitating Christ and what He sacrificed for you.* Friends, this should be how we’re all growing. The more we study and learn about Christ, the more we need to take it to heart and apply it to our own behaviors and

attitudes. Our knowledge should fuel an eagerness to love *all* others and sacrifice on their behalf.

Consider: How are you applying your growing knowledge and spiritual maturity for the benefit of others? How do you see God growing your love for other believers and unbelievers?

Pray: Thank God for the example He set and for His continual provision for the growth of His people. Ask Him to fuel your love for His church and for the lost; and ask Him to show you how you can readily show it.

By Jennifer Skinner