

07/25/10

Getting to the Heart of Handling Your Liberties – 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

- I know that many of the people in our church are students, and are already looking forward to going back to school in just a few weeks...
- to help everyone warm up to that process, I thought I'd start our time this morning with a little quiz – are you up for that?...
- please tell me what the following ten items have in common...

1. Ice, 2. Coal, 3. Toothpaste, 4. Sponges, 5. Mud, 6. Chalk, 7. Laundry Soap, 8. Matches, 9. Starch, 10. Rubber

- (feel free to take a moment and I'll tell you what the pictures are... you just tell me what they have in common... discuss this with the person around you...do you want to see the list once again?...**Repeat**)
- Ok what do those items have in common?...
- According to a recent survey – which was posted on the internet, which means it has to absolutely accurate and completely scientific...those are the top ten answers given by pregnant women when asked to name their strangest craving...(repeat the answers...)
- by the way, a few others that were frequently mentioned but did not break the top ten list included bricks, newspapers, and raw sausages.
- the principle that illustrates is – our cravings can be rather unusual to say the least...
- not only that – they can be incredibly strong...
- take the story of this man...(show pic of man who robbed convenience store)...
- he was arrested a couple of weeks ago in Vero Beach, Florida after deputies from the Sheriff's Department responded to a burglar alarm at a convenience store at 3:00 in the morning...
 - when they arrived they found the front window of the store smashed...
 - about 15 minutes later they arrested this man who reportedly was sweating and breathing heavily...
 - apparently he had stolen hundreds of cartons of menthol cigarettes from the store to satisfy his craving for nicotine...
 - the reason he was sweating and breathing heavily is because he had just dug a hole and buried the cigarettes in the ground...
 - apparently he thought he could go back later and dig them up whenever he needed a smoke... That's called "really liking your cigarettes"...
- so yes, our cravings can be unusual, and they can be incredibly strong...
- now, let's turn that around to you...what do you crave?...
 - and by the way, if your answer is, "nothing," I need to love you enough to tell you, you're wrong about that...
 - we all have cravings, desires, lusts, idols...and it is important to recognize that they are individualized...
 - that's what James meant when he said...

- James 1:14 - But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

- own – idias – idiosyncrasy
- in other words, your “wants” (cravings, desires, etc) may be significantly different than the person sitting next to you...and we all know that when we think about...
 - some friends surprised me with a fly in fishing trip for my 50th birthday...and so we were up in Canada the week before last fishing for 12-14 hours per day...I couldn't get enough of it and I would have happily stayed longer...I wanted to go fishing with my friends...
 - some of you would say – shoot me now – I would never want to fish that long...
- and that's the point – we all want different things...and I'm asking you this morning – what do you want?...
- and I realize that your response at this point might be – I'm not sure...I don't really think about that very often...
- part of my job is to help all of us think about things that are crucial to the process of our growth in Christ, especially the kinds of things we might not regularly consider...
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 10...(page 135 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...)
- we're doing a series this year entitled **Taking the Next Step...with Joy...**
 - this is a verse by verse exposition of the book of 1 Corinthians...
 - right now we're working through a crucial section of this book...chapter 8, 9, and 10...which all form a single unit on the topic of Christian Liberty...areas of the Christian Life that are not specifically spelled out in Scripture in black and white terms...so you have freedom to navigate between certain established parameters or buoys...
- now we're not saying that everything in the Christian life is just various shades of gray...
 - thou shalt not murder...that's really black and white...
 - Well I wanted to murder my boss this week...you have zero freedom there, OK? That's is not an area of Christian liberty...God's Word speaks to that quite clearly, directly, and absolutely...and I hope all the people who work here at the church took careful note of that...
 - but whether you went out to see a movie last night, and what movie you might have seen is an entirely different issue...
 - there isn't a “thou shalt not” that governs that one...
- and many of the choices you and I make every day involve Christian liberty...
- that's why Paul would devote such a significant percentage of this book to this single topic...
- so if you've been thinking as we moved through this material, “well, this really isn't for me...”
- I would want to ask you, with a sweet smile on my face, On what spiritual planet are you spending the majority of your time?...
 - these kinds of issues come up daily...for you, for everyone in your family, and everyone in your life...
- now, we've worked our way through 2 chapters already...
 - and the basic theme started with – be careful about how the way you exercise your liberties could negatively impact someone else...it would be possible for you to cause

someone else to stumble...is exercising your freedom in a callous or uncalculated fashion really worth harming another person in the body of Christ?...

- then Paul launched into this extended discussion in chapter 9 about how churches should generously compensate their pastors and other Christian workers...
- and just when you're scratching your head thinking – what does this have to do with Christian liberty...you read...
 - **1 Corinthians 9:15 - But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case;**
 - and he gives the reason in places like verse 19...**1 Corinthians 9:19 - For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.**
- so here's the point – up to now, the focus has been on seriously considering the value of often voluntarily enslaving your liberty because you do not want to negatively impact another brother or sister in Christ, or maybe someone who has not come to know the Lord yet...
- but what we need to see at the end of chapter 9 is – Paul switches the focus in a rather dramatic way...because he uses the illustration of a runner...
 - and it's the same principle...many times you should just voluntarily enslave your freedoms...just because you can doesn't always mean you should...but look at the reason right at the end of verse 27...**1 Corinthians 9:27 - but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.**
- did you see the switch?...the development of the logic)...see, there's also the issue of how exercising your liberties might affect you...
- and even though these chapter and verse divisions were inserted later just to help us easily find our way around God's Word...chapter 9 ends like a cliffhanger chapter in a good book...
 - it just takes your breath away and ends...you could exercise your Christian liberty in such a way that you disqualify yourself...
 - and you're left saying...what?...there's no way I would want that to happen...
- [if time, tell the story of the Endurathon and because of the warmth of water, swimmers having to decide if they wanted to wear their wetsuits and face an automatic disqualification...)
- so to be sure that we would never disqualify ourselves by the way we exercised our freedoms, let's see what Paul says about this in the first part of chapter 10...**read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13...**
- even a casual reading of those verses demonstrates that Paul is honing in on the essential elements of his argument here...and what we have to see is that the focus is not on the behaviors associated with Christian liberty...but on the heart...
- so today we're talking about **Getting to the Heart of Handling Your Freedoms**...and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **Four lessons to help us give appropriate attention to the inner man as we make decisions about handling freedoms for our bodies.**

I. Remember that Blessing and Freedom is No Guarantee of Success.

- this was probably obvious to many here—but it may have been confusing to others...

- Paul is going back to the experiences of the children of Israel in the wilderness to illustrate and develop what he's been discussing in the previous 2 chapters...
- having freedoms isn't automatically a good thing...being blessed certainly is no guarantee that we will respond properly...and the children of Israel are the perfect example of that...

A. The blessing and freedom of God's presence.

- **1 Corinthians 10:1 - For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud...**
- that's referring to the pillar of cloud representing the special presence of God which led the children of Israel by day...
- imagine what that would have been like...or what it would be like today...
 - you're out car shopping...do we buy the red one or the blue one...
 - the pillar of God goes over and rests on the blue one...that would come in pretty handy...
 - what an incredible blessing that would be...and what incredible freedom that would provide for people who genuinely wanted to serve God...

B. The blessing and freedom of God's power.

- **1 Corinthians 10:1 - For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;**
- if you know anything about the Bible, you know that's talking about the crossing of the Red Sea...
- how could you ever doubt God, or displease God, after experiencing that...
- tremendous freedom to obey God now because you've physically and personally witnessed His power...

C. The blessing and freedom of godly leaders.

- Paul made a fascinating statement in verse 12 when he said...**1 Corinthians 10:2 - and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;**
- you say – what's that mean?...well, baptism in the Bible is always some sort of identification...and in this case, they were identified with God's great servant Moses...
 - in other words – they had all sorts of things going for them...
 - so when they had an opportunity to exercise some freedom – some choice that was not specifically called out in Scripture – surely they would make the right choice...

D. The blessing and freedom of God's provision.

- **1 Corinthians 10:3-4 - and all ate the same spiritual food;**
 - what's that talking about?...manna...(Exodus 16:15)
- **1 Corinthians 10:3-4 - ...and all drank the same spiritual drink,**
 - referring to – God giving them water from a rock...(Exodus 17:6)
 - and amazingly Paul explains, **1 Corinthians 10:4 - ...for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.**
- but what happened anyway?...
 - **1 Corinthians 10:5 - Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. (Speaking of the grumbling and complaining in Numbers 14 when they refused to go up and take the promise land because of unbelief.)**
 - most of them is an understatement – eventually, it was all of them except Joshua and Caleb...

- why, because they had freedom of speech...God didn't tell them – OK, I've blessed you in all these ways...now here's the script...here's exactly what I want you to say...like some sort of parrot...or doll with a pull string in its back..."I love you God..."
- no, they had freedom...and they used that freedom to grumble and complain and exaggerate their trials and ignore God's blessings...
- and the text says---they were **laid low—katastrounnumi – “To strew or spread over”**...
- see, to thread the argument back up to the end of chapter 9 – they disqualified themselves from the race because they didn't handle their freedom of speech well...
 - it didn't just negatively affect someone else...it negatively affected them...
- I wonder how many people will be here today – and without a doubt God has blessed us in all sorts of incredible ways...yet the response when we had the freedom to make a choice in a given instance was to displease God...
 - For example many have been on vacations this summer...
 - what an incredible blessing to live in a culture where many of us actually receive paid vacation time...and have some measure of discretionary income so that we can get in the car and go somewhere...
 - and do you know how some people handle those blessings and freedoms...
 - by getting in the car and starting to grump about something...
 - and being a general, self-centered pain in the neck on vacation instead of using that freedom to deny self, and enjoy one another's company, and encourage the others on the trip...
- that's Paul's point here – blessing and freedom is certainly no guarantee of success...so what do we do about that?...it has to be more than just focusing on the behaviors...that's why the next verses are all about...

II. Learn to View Your Freedoms Through the Lens of Your Heart.

A. Take careful stock of your cravings.

- see, the solution to the children of Israel's misuse of their freedom of speech wasn't to paste words of thanksgiving on an idolatrous heart...
- the key to handling Christian liberty issues is to give careful attention to the inner man...
- that's why the questions I asked you at the beginning are so important...what do you crave, what do you desire, what do you want...
- for example---some people who say they are followers of Christ dress in a very immodest, provocative fashion...
 - so what is the solution...Churches issuing dress codes...here's what you have to wear when you come to church...here's what it has to be at the mall...here's the acceptable outfit for gardening...
 - and I'm not saying that dress codes are wrong in every situation by any means...
 - but is that what you want a church to do...is that what you want the Christian life to be like?...
 - you can't print rules fast enough to control the actions of a rebellious heart...
- so let's take immodesty...what do some people want by dressing that way?...

- they crave attention...they crave the approval of man...they think they're all that, and they want everybody else to know it---and maybe even to be jealous of it...Now, please follow the developments of the logic.
- and here's the point – the problem in that scenario is not the tight jeans, or the short shorts, or the revealing top...the problem is an unrestrained, wicked heart...
- and I realize you might say – well, I don't even think about my desires when I'm making Christian liberty decisions...
- here's today's news – just because you don't think about it doesn't mean you won't be held responsible for it...

B. Ultimately this is an issue of worship.

- **1 Corinthians 10:7 - Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play."**
- the way we handle our freedom reveals the identity of our functional god...
- back to the wearing certain kinds of clothes so you'll attract someone else's attention...
 - what, wasn't the attention of the Savior enough?...
 - and what does that desire say about what you think of Christ?...
 - you really need to dress that way so the guy with the nice looking car will notice you?...do you really want to worship him?...see, who is your god?...
- or those who say---well, I have the freedom to drink this....well, maybe...but why are you drinking it?...that's the key question...
- well, it helps me relax, or it gives me peace, or I find acceptance with my friends...
 - do you hear what you're saying?...
 - Christ can't help you relax?...He can't give you peace?...He can't provide acceptance?...
 - that's why the fundamental church's emphasis so frequently simply on keeping all sorts of behavioral standards fell so short...
 - because if you don't change the heart...outward conformity won't last any longer than the copy of last year's rule book...
- and here's the insidious thing...for people who worship approval – they can become experts at keeping all the rules---all the standards---
 - why?...not because their heart loves God...but because it loves the approval of the authorities...
 - and you take a person like that who was living for the approval of man by keeping the rules and then they graduate and there's no more approval of man to go along with keeping the rules...they go crazy...
 - why?...because there was never a fundamental change in the heart...

C. Hate immorality so much that you will carefully guard your heart before the behavior develops.

- this is referring to the tragic events of Numbers 25 and the orgy that the children of Israel participated in with the children of Moab...
- and that is another huge point here – if you don't handle these desires in their infancy, they will grow to outrageous proportions...and at some point it is practically impossible to control the beast...

- **James 1:14-15 - But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**
- what's the point?...hate the possibility of displeasing God in your behavior so much that you trace the process all the way back to the source and stop it there...
- that's what's wrong with going as far as you can down the sin trail...is it sin yet?...
- and in the case of the children of Israel and Numbers 25 – instead of having a positive godly impact on the people of Moab – they ended up becoming just like the people of Moab...
- (develop all of the community ministries we're seeking to develop – that should increase our willingness to think about freedoms from the perspective of the heart...)

D. Understand the crucial place of thanksgiving in this process.

- **1 Corinthians 10:10 - Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.**
- some of us push our freedoms and push our freedoms because we have to have more and we have to have more...more approval, more rush, more sensation,
- and the sad thing is – what we find at the end of the process is that what we went after wasn't nearly as satisfying as a relationship with Christ would have been all along...
- we said by our actions that His grace was not enough when the fact is that it was all along...
- **C. S. Lewis -- Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.**
- (develop – someone constantly complaining about their spouse – instead of finding joy in Christ regardless of the behavior of their spouse)

- now, where does verse 12 fit into all of this?...

III. Don't Let Pride Lead You Into Dangerous "Liberty Choices."

- **1 Corinthians 10:12 - Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.**
- we've all heard that verse many times...but we don't always consider it in its context...
- this was given smack dab in the middle of a discussion about Christian liberty...
- I can handle that...I can handle that...I can handle that...
- I'm free to go there...I'm free to watch that...I'm free to be around that...it won't hurt me...I can stop whenever I want...
- what kind of words are those?...the foolish words of a proud heart...
- that's why I'm glad that we have all sorts of people here today who could stand up and say – you know, there are all sorts of things that I'm not sure about---so I just choose not to...I'm going to err on the side of safety...

- those are words and actions that flow out of a heart that has learned the art of humility...
- (develop the gospel – can only handle freedom this way if Christ is your savior and Lord...the object of your adoration and worship...)
- well, what about verse 13?...another great verse, seldom considered in its context...

IV. Cultivate a Heart of Hope because of God's Faithfulness

- you might hear what we're talking about today and find it overwhelming...
- that is not the way the Lord would want us to leave this study...

A. Others have gone before us and handled their freedoms well.

1 Corinthians 10:13a - No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man...

B. Because of God's faithfulness, He will not give you "liberty choices" that are beyond your ability to handle well.

- 1 Corinthians 10:13b - and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

(conclusion – some of the cravings we mentioned at the beginning seemed pretty wild. But then when we look at some of the things we crave that take us down the path of making wrong choices about how we use our freedoms...we can look pretty wild too.

Q1 – Do you know Christ so that He can help you make wise choices in this area?

Q2 – Are there desires of your heart that need to be confessed and forsaken?)