

“How to Read the Bible For All It’s Worth”

1 Corinthians 10

Should Christians go to R-rated movies? Should they drink alcoholic beverages such as beer or wine? Should they wear expensive clothes, makeup and jewelry? Should they attend a same-sex wedding? Debates over “questionable” practices are as old as the church. The Corinthians were divided over several issues such as whether Christians could eat food offered to idols. Some refused to eat such food in any setting. Others felt so “liberated” that they could eat the Lord’s Supper and then commit sexual immorality as if baptism and communion were automatic protection against God’s judgment. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul turns to several Bible stories for wisdom and some very practical advice.

Opening Question(s) – Choose one

- What “questionable” practices have you wrestled with personally?
- What kind of spiritual heritage did your “forefathers/mothers” leave you? What kind of spiritual heritage would you like to pass on to your kids/grandkids?

Study Questions

- 1) **Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.** What experiences did all the Israelites have in common when they left Egypt and headed for the Promised Land? (Take time to find and read some of these stories from the Exodus using cross references¹. For example, read about “the cloud” in Ex. 13:21)
- 2) Even though God blessed them, and they shared all these powerful spiritual experiences, what was God’s attitude toward most of the Israelites (v.5)? What happened to them and why?
- 3) Why does Paul remind the Corinthians (and us) of these events (v.6)?
- 4) How are Israel’s experiences meant to benefit us (v.11)? What kind of attitude calls for the warning of verse 12?
- 5) **Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22.** What are some “idols” you see being worshipped today?
- 6) What is Paul’s simple instruction when it comes to whether or not believers should participate in pagan temple worship/celebrations (v.14)? What stories (ancient or contemporary) can you think of where the response of “sensible people” (v.15) was similar (i.e. leave or “flee”)?
- 7) To support his appeal to avoid participating in pagan celebrations Paul appeals to the Christian’s participation in the Lord’s Supper (vv.16-17) and Israel’s participation (v.18) in the sacrifices at the altar. How would you explain to a friend that eating bread and drinking the cup is a “participation” in Christ’s body and blood (vv.16-17)?
- 8) Although idols themselves are nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 8⁴), why is participating in the sacrifices of pagan not a neutral activity (vv.19-22)? In our own culture today, what activities or practices have some connection with the demonic?

¹ See Exodus 13²¹; 14^{22,29}; 17⁶; Numbers 14²⁹; Exodus 32^{4,6,19}; Numbers 25¹⁻⁹; 21⁵⁻⁶; 16⁴¹⁻⁴⁹

9) **Read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1.** In verse 23, how does the standard of discernment the Corinthians have been applying, compare to the standards Paul recommends? What activities today are considered “permissible” by some Christians but would not make the “beneficial” or “constructive” bar Paul counsels?

10) What settings, other than meals in pagan temples, did the Corinthians need to decide whether or not to eat meat that had been offered to idols? Explain in your own words how he suggests handling each one (and why).

11) Describe a situation where you refrained from doing something, not because of your own conscience but for the sake of someone else’s (vv.18-29a). Describe a situation where you were denounced for what you did by a fellow Christian yet, given the choice, would do it again (i.e. you felt the limitations others expected of you were inappropriate). Explain the reason for your different responses.²

12) In these verses Paul takes into account the conscience of unbelievers. Do you act differently around Christians and non-Christians? If so, under what circumstances?

² Notice that at times Jesus avoided causing unnecessary offense (e.g. Matt. 17:24-27; cf. Rom. 14:13-23), and at other times knowingly offended others (e.g. Matt. 9:1-8; 9:14-17; 12:1-14; 15:1-14).