



CHRISTIAN DECISION MAKING

Lesson 3: Decisions and Christian Freedom

Introduction

In the previous lesson we explored the kinds of decisions for which God gives us clear guidance in his Word. But not every matter we face is a moral issue. Should I wear a white shirt or a blue one? Nothing in God's Word says I must wear one or must not wear the other. It's a choice I get to make.

In today's lesson we want to take a closer look at the decisions we get to make that aren't a matter of moral right or wrong. In such things, are our choices simply personal preference? Does God care what we decide? Does he offer any additional guidance to help us decide? Let's take a look ...

When it's wrong to do something right

Many of life's everyday decisions do not fall into God's absolutes of right or wrong. Rather, they are what theologians call "adiaphora" which comes from a Greek word that means: "free things," that is, things where God has given us freedom to make our own choices. The Apostle Paul shares some helpful principles for decision-making in "free things" in 1 Corinthians 8:

1 Corinthians 8: ⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

⁷ But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

1. The first principle that Paul teaches concerns idols (verses 4 and 5). How should a Christian view an idol?
2. In your own words, explain the problem that some members of the Corinthian congregation were experiencing when they or other members of their congregation would eat meat from the meat market connected to idol temples. (verse 7)
3. What principle does Paul share to help clarify the concern? (verse 8)
4. If what's on the menu isn't a moral issue, what spiritual motivation drives Paul to refrain from eating certain foods in the company of some fellow Christians? (verses 9-13)

The Christian may be free to use something, but will want to make sure that the decision to use it doesn't cause someone else to fall into sin.

Build each other up in love

Paul explained to the Romans the principles he used in deciding what choice to make in “free things” (adiaphora). Read the selected verses from Romans 14 & 15 and answer the accompanying questions.

14: ¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.

5. Verse 1—What important insight does this verse identify about matters that are “free things”?

14: ⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

6. Verses 5 and 6—In matters not decided directly by the Word of God, what motivation and focus shapes the decisions a Christian makes in “free things”?

14:¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

7. Verses 13, 15, and 19—What additional consideration do these verses supply the Christian as they weigh their choices in “free things”?

15: ¹ We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.

8. Chapter 15, verses 1 and 2—When it comes to the choices we get to make regarding “free things” what do these verses add to how to think through such decisions?

Love, not personal rights, is what guides the Christian in deciding how to use things God has neither commanded nor forbidden. We exercise our Christian freedom responsibly by asking questions like: “Is it loving to do this?” “Or will someone be led to doubt the power of Christ and the truth of Christianity by our actions?”

Protecting Christian Freedom

Read: 1 Corinthians 6: ¹² “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

9. What does this verse teach about the freedom we have as Christians?

10. What does Paul mean when he says he does not want to be “mastered” by things he is free to use?

11. Evaluate: Even though I have a right to do something, I shouldn’t always do it.

Read: Galatians 5: ¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.

Circumcision used to be one of God's religious commands to Israel. But after Christ fulfilled the Old Testament law, circumcision no longer held spiritual significance. Some Jewish people chose to use the custom as a way of worshiping God; others chose not to use it. The issue in Galatia was that people were being told they *had* to be circumcised.

12. Paul is addressing a situation where freedom is threatened and in order to protect that freedom there are certain choices we are now compelled to make. In your own words describe such a scenario.

13. Apply: The moderate use of alcohol is an example of a "free thing" for the Christian. God does not command that we must drink, nor does he say must avoid alcohol completely. How would you decide whether to imbibe or refrain in the following situations:

- A friend invites you out to a restaurant that serves alcohol. This friend comes from a home environment where there has been alcohol abuse.
- You have invited friends over for a gathering. One of your friends struggles with knowing "when to say when" and has over-indulged on several previous occasions.
- You invite friends to a church-sponsored Super Bowl party at the church campus. The church has said its ok to bring alcohol to the gathering. The friends you've invited grew up in a church that taught that using alcohol is sinful.

In areas where God has neither commanded nor forbidden us, we must choose actions that guard our Christian freedom.

We dare not be mastered by anything and therefore become slave to its power, nor should we allow someone else to burden our conscience that we must do something where Christ has given us freedom.

Summary

In future lessons, we will address making general decisions in life. However, the principles we have learned in this lesson apply to all the decisions we make. In whatever we do, our main goal is to serve others and work toward the good of the kingdom of God.

Life with God

This week memorize 1 Corinthians 10:23 and repeat it every day of the week.

1 Corinthians 10: 23 "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive.