

Glorifying God in All We Do

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Good evening. It's good to see you all. Those of you who don't know me, my name's Mark. I'm one of the pastors here. Well, you've got two choices tonight. You could either refer to the Bible reading which is in your handout here, which you could scribble all over if you want, or you can avail yourself to the new Bibles. So the new NIV Bibles have come, so they're the same version, but probably on the Bibles you shouldn't scribble on.

Well, let me pray before we start. Dear God, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that it comforts us, but at times it also warns us. And so we pray tonight that as we look at your word, we take to heart the warnings because they are actually for our good. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So there's the outline as well if you want to follow on the front of that handout. Well, many people believe that the Titanic was unsinkable. So when the captain was asked about the safety of the ship, he said, I cannot imagine any condition which would cause the ship to founder. I cannot conceive of any vital disaster happening to this vessel. Modern shipbuilding has gone beyond that. One passenger tried to take out extra insurance on her luggage, only to be told, don't be ridiculous, this boat's unsinkable. Even after the ship hit the iceberg, a passenger was told to go back to bed because the ship was unsinkable. As the ship began to list, another passenger was said to have told another passenger not to be concerned because this boat cannot sink. And when early reports began to reach the vice president of the ship owner in New York, he responded by saying, we place absolute confidence in the Titanic.

We believe that the boat is unsinkable. unsinkable. And when one passenger asked the deckhand, is this ship really unsinkable? The man replied, yes, lady. God himself couldn't sink the ship.

Well, of course we know what happened to the Titanic, don't we? Well, I think some people today believe their Christian faith, likewise, is unsinkable.

[2 : 26] Maybe not consciously, but that's how they may live their lives. And this may have been the view of many in Corinth. So they would have looked at themselves and they would have thought, I've got the gift of tongues. I've got the gift of healing. I've got knowledge. I understand theology.

I know that I'm saved by grace, not works. And I'm part of God's elect. I come to church regularly. I've been baptized. I take the Lord's Supper. Surely I'm safe and guaranteed to go to heaven. And so it would have been a great surprise to them for Paul to warn in this chapter that anyone can fall from faith, that those things that we've just talked about aren't guarantees. And in fact, Paul himself at the end of chapter 9 would have ensured, spoken of himself, that he wanted to ensure that he himself wasn't disqualified, even though he had saved others. And so Paul says, if you don't believe me, look at your forefathers.

And so look with me at chapter 10 of verse 1. Paul says, Paul says, You see what they all experienced together?

As far as they were concerned, God couldn't have done anything more.

[4 : 13] And Paul even says that they drank from the rock, which was Christ. Well, we don't have time tonight to unpack what it means for the rock to be Christ or what being baptized into Moses means.

But I think Paul's point is this, that their ancestors, their forefathers experienced God's deliverance, and that deliverance was real. God really did save them from Egypt.

Yet most of them missed out ultimately on salvation. For that's what Paul goes on to say in verse 5. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them.

Their bodies were sacrificed in the wilderness. Somewhere along the line, most of them fell because of idolatry. And so if you look over verses 6 to 11, you'll see all these incidents which Paul talks about, which were incidents from the books of Exodus and Numbers.

They happened between the time they left Egypt and before they entered the Promised Land some 40 years later. And all those incidents relate to food and drink, just as the issue at Corinth was food and drink.

[5 : 25] But in each case, the trigger was, the food was the trigger for their idolatry. They weren't just eating and drinking. They were eating and drinking as part of sacrifices to pagan gods.

Either that or else they were grumbling to God about their food and drink and wishing that they were back in Egypt. In effect, they were saying they would be happy to live under the gods of Egypt, provided they got better food.

So the result was God's judgment, even though God had saved them from Egypt earlier. And all this happened, as a warning, Paul says, for the Corinthians and ultimately for us as well.

But for us and for the Corinthians, the stakes are even higher because in verse 11, Paul says, For us, the end of the ages or the culmination of the ages has come.

So Israel drank from the rock, but we drink from Christ himself. They were baptized into Moses, but we have God's own spirit.

[6 : 38] So the question is, how seriously do we take this warning? Or do we think a bit like the Corinthians? After all, we are at church most weeks.

We're not living in obvious sin. I read my Bible and pray. I've been a Christian for many years. I even grew up in a Christian home. But Paul says, no one is immune.

And so if we read in verse 12, he says, So if you think you are standing, be careful that you don't fall. It's those who think they are standing who are at greatest risk.

So don't be cocky, Paul says. There is no room for pride and arrogance in the Christian life. No one is beyond suffering the same fate as the Israelites. Of course, part of our problem today is that I think our idolatry is less obvious.

We don't have wooden statues in our homes. We're not often asked or never asked to partake in pagan meals. But idolatry takes many forms, doesn't it?

[7 : 50] Anything that takes our allegiance away from God is an idol. It doesn't need to be physical. And one way it shows up is through addiction.

Some addictions are obvious, like drugs, alcohol, and pornography. But there are also other more subtle ones as well. Like our iPhones, Facebook, our social chat sites, share trading, gym junkies, shopaholics, travel bugs.

These things are not wrong in and of themselves, but they can so easily draw us away from God. They start taking more and more of our time, our money, our energy.

And often they also damage our human relationships as well as our relationship with God. Of course, there's idolatry that is apart from addiction as well.

So we can idolize our careers, our homes, our children. In fact, almost anything can be turned into an idol. We can always turn the good things that God has given us into God things.

[9 : 05] The good things from God become gods in our lives. So where are we in terms of idolatry? In terms of the gods in our lives?

Do we have them? Now, of course, once we realize the danger, then Paul also goes on to give us great assurance in what he says next.

So in verse 13, he says, No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. Yes, our faith will be tested from time to time. And there will be temptations and trials along the way.

But if we trust God and turn away from idols, then Paul says, God is faithful. God is faithful and he will provide a way out so that you will not fall.

[10 : 05] He will ensure that you will not be tested beyond what you can bear. And so it's sort of important to hold both those truths in balance, isn't it? On the one hand, we need to heed the warning that anyone can fall, no one's safe, no one's unsinkable.

And yet on the other hand, we need to also believe God's assurance that if we put our trust in Jesus, then God will help us to endure. There will be a way out so we can praise God for that.

Well, let's turn now to the rest of the passage because I think what happens now is that having given us that assurance, Paul then goes on to give us a few principles of how we can endure. And so I've got those three of them there in the notes. When we are tested, Paul tells us how we can find a way out. And just by the way, these verses I think concludes the section we've been looking at between chapters 8 and 10 over the last three weeks. And interestingly, a lot of Paul's application here mirrors what he has also given in chapters 5 and 6 in relation to sexual immorality. So I've got a few slides of verses which show you how those instructions actually are mirrored between 8 and 10 and 5 and 6. [11 : 28] And you'll see them as we go along. So the first instruction Paul gives is to flee idolatry. That's verse 14. And he says that as well in chapter 6 and verse 18, flee sexual immorality.

Now, fleeing, as you can imagine, it's not flirting. It's trying to run away as fast as you can. It's like in the movies when someone's running away from that ticking time bomb.

Fleeing is not flirting. It's not trying to contain whatever is holding you as an idol. You don't tell a drug addict if he's trying to kick a habit to go from five shoots a day down to four, then three, then two, then one.

No, you tell him that he needs to go cold turkey. And so that's the same with idolatry and particularly with addiction. You've got to kick it rather than try and manage it and manage it down.

So I know of friends, for example, that have very courageously disconnected themselves from Facebook because they knew they were getting addicted to it. They were spending hours on it, sleeping, thinking, every waking hour, checking their Facebook.

[12 : 42] The same with credit card debt. If you're enslaved to it, then you've got to tear up the card. And same with things like computer games, the DS, the Xbox, you need to sort of take drastic action and stay clear from it rather than flirt with danger.

Don't think that these things won't cause you to fall from faith. And the reason Paul says to flee is because you can't manage your way out of idolatry because there are spiritual forces that are very strong at work, which is my second point to be spiritually aware.

So if you read from verse 15, he says, I speak to sensible people. Judge for yourself what I say. It's not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ.

And it's not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ. Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body for we all share the one loaf. Consider the people of Israel.

Do those, do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that food sacrificed to idols is anything or that an idol is anything?

[13 : 56] No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too.

You cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are you trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he? So what Paul is doing here is he's using the Lord's Supper as an example to bring out his point.

At the physical level, what he's saying is that the bread and wine that we take at the Lord's Supper is just food, like everything else we eat. But at another level, something deeply spiritual is happening when we eat at the Lord's table.

By eating and drinking at the Lord's table, we share in the body and blood of Christ. We own his salvation on the cross for us. We are part of his body. We worship him as our head, our Lord and Savior.

Likewise, when the Israelites and Corinthians eat at the pagans' sacrifices, what they're doing is actually uniting themselves with the spiritual powers behind those sacrifices.

[15 : 08] It's like we saw two weeks ago. It's not the food that actually defiles them. It's the actual fact that they're aligning themselves by being participants with the demons behind those idols.

So Paul wants us to see beyond the physical realm into the spiritual realm where a battle of allegiance is being fought between the demons and the Lord Jesus.

The quote from C.S. Lewis is very apt and he says that there is no neutral ground in this universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.

And so many of our choices are not purely physical, material, or financial ones. They are deeply spiritual as well. Every time we make a choice whether we're spending our money or making decisions about the time we devote to certain things, we are, whether we're knowing it or not, participating in this spiritual battle behind the physical.

And every decision we make is either aligned with God or aligned with Satan. We are either part of God's kingdom or part of Satan's kingdom. Or as verse 21 says, we eat either at the Lord's table or at the table of demons, drinking the Lord's cup or the demon's cup.

[16:38] And the way Paul sets it up, you can't do both. Again, it's something that Paul had already reminded them in relation to sexual immorality. For there, in chapter 6 and verse 15, he actually also said, do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. So, as with the body, so with the rest of our lives. So, for example, before you accept a job, don't just think about, you know, the pay and the conditions and all those aspects around them.

Ask yourself as well what that job would do for your relationship with God. Before you start entering into a relationship with someone, ask that same question.

Does he or she bring you closer to God or further away from God? And I could go on in relation to, you know, purchases in life, hobbies, but at every stage the question should be, is that something drawing me closer to God or further from God?

By doing that, am I eating at the Lord's table or eating at the demon's table? Which leads me to the third point, which is to think helpful as well as lawful.

[17:59] which is, I think we need to ask questions that are beyond what is strictly right or wrong. We need to ask questions that go to whether something is helpful or not.

And so Paul says, as we read on in verse 23, I have the right to do anything, but not everything is beneficial. I have the right to do anything, but not everything is constructive.

So our attitude shouldn't be, what is the minimum I can get away with in terms of whether it's right or wrong? How far can I go without sinning?

Rather, we want to ask the question, what is the thing that I can do that maximizes the helpfulness for us? Actually, if you look at those verses, Paul's focus here is not actually on ourselves, but actually on others.

And it's the same point as we had two weeks ago. But here, I think Paul goes even further because he says that the others are not just those people that are in the church, but even for people that are outside the church.

[19:03] We are to work out what is most helpful even for unbelievers. And so he can say in verse 32, do not cause anyone to stumble whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God.

And so when he says others, he means everyone else, not just those in the church. Now, why would Paul go to such lengths? I think his motivation is found in the verse before that in verse 31.

He says, so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. His motivation is to glorify God. And again, let me just go back to chapter 6 in relation to sexual immorality.

He had said earlier that you were bought at a price therefore glorify God with your body. And so in all these chapters, his emphasis here is that whatever you do, you are to do it because you want to glorify God.

And glorifying God is the flip side, really, of fleeing idolatry. So we don't just want to run away from something, we want to run towards something as well, or in this case, run towards someone, and that someone is God.

[20:15] the more we glorify God, and the more we do what he wants. The more we glorify God, the more we do what he wants.