

## “Avoiding Trouble”

### 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13

**10** <sup>1-5</sup> Remember our history, friends, and be warned. All our ancestors were led by the providential Cloud and taken miraculously through the Sea. They went through the waters, in a baptism like ours, as Moses led them from enslaving death to salvation life. They all ate and drank identical food and drink, meals provided daily by God. They drank from the Rock, God’s fountain for them that stayed with them wherever they were. And the Rock was Christ. But just experiencing God’s wonder and grace didn’t seem to mean much—most of them were defeated by temptation during the hard times in the desert, and God was not pleased.

**6-10** The same thing could happen to us. We must be on guard so that we never get caught up in wanting our own way as they did. And we must not turn our religion into a circus as they did—“First the people partied, then they threw a dance.” We must not be sexually promiscuous—they paid for that, remember, with 23,000 deaths in one day! We must never try to get Christ to serve us instead of us serving him; they tried it, and God launched an epidemic of poisonous snakes. We must be careful not to stir up discontent; discontent destroyed them.

**11-12** These are all warning markers—DANGER!—in our history books, written down so that we don’t repeat their mistakes. Our positions in the story are parallel—they at the beginning, we at the end—and we are just as capable of messing it up as they were. Don’t be so naive and self-confident. You’re not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it’s useless. Cultivate God-confidence.

**13** No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he’ll never let you be pushed past your limit; he’ll always be there to help you come through it.

**14** So, my very dear friends, when you see people reducing God to something they can use or control, get out of their company as fast as you can.

**15-18** I assume I’m addressing believers now who are mature. Draw your own conclusions: When we drink the cup of blessing, aren’t we taking into ourselves the blood, the very life, of Christ? And isn’t it the same with the loaf of bread we break and eat? Don’t we take into ourselves the body, the very life, of Christ? Because there is one loaf, our many-ness becomes one-ness—Christ doesn’t become fragmented in us. Rather, we become unified in him. We don’t reduce Christ to what we are; he raises us to what he

is. That's basically what happened even in old Israel—those who ate the sacrifices offered on God's altar entered into God's action at the altar.

**19-22** Do you see the difference? Sacrifices offered to idols are offered to nothing, for what's the idol but a nothing? Or worse than nothing, a minus, a demon! I don't want you to become part of something that reduces you to less than yourself. And you can't have it both ways, banqueting with the Master one day and slumming with demons the next. Besides, the Master won't put up with it. He wants *us*—all or nothing. Do you think you can get off with anything less?

**23-24** Looking at it one way, you could say, "Anything goes. Because of God's immense generosity and grace, we don't have to dissect and scrutinize every action to see if it will pass muster." But the point is not to just get by. We want to live well, but our foremost efforts should be to help *others* live well.

**25-28** With that as a base to work from, common sense can take you the rest of the way. Eat anything sold at the butcher shop, for instance; you don't have to run an "idolatry test" on every item. "The earth," after all, "is God's, and everything in it." That "everything" certainly includes the leg of lamb in the butcher shop. If a nonbeliever invites you to dinner and you feel like going, go ahead and enjoy yourself; eat everything placed before you. It would be both bad manners and bad spirituality to cross-examine your host on the ethical purity of each course as it is served. On the other hand, if he goes out of his way to tell you that this or that was sacrificed to god or goddess so-and-so, you should pass. Even though you may be indifferent as to where it came from, he isn't, and you don't want to send mixed messages to him about who *you* are worshiping.

**29-30** But, except for these special cases, I'm not going to walk around on eggshells worrying about what small-minded people might say; I'm going to stride free and easy, knowing what our large-minded Master has already said. If I eat what is served to me, grateful to God for what is on the table, how can I worry about what someone will say? I thanked God for it and he blessed it!

**31-33** So eat your meals heartily, not worrying about what others say about you—you're eating to God's glory, after all, not to please them. As a matter of fact, do everything that way, heartily and freely to God's glory. At the same time, don't be callous in your exercise of freedom, thoughtlessly stepping on the toes of those who aren't as free as you are. I try my best to be considerate of everyone's feelings in all these matters; I hope you will be, too.

It is not fair for a preacher to come back from vacation and have the challenge of preaching from this text. But it seems that the Holy Spirit has other ideas. Because we cannot find a more relevant text to our current situation than this one from 1 Corinthians. The entire letter “highlights the difficulties of blending into one collective; [of bringing together people from] diverse cultural backgrounds, various social locations and conflicting sentiments into one community. In this part of the text which we lift up today, Paul is discussing with the church in Corinth what is important when believers gather, challenging them to discern what is their task when the community comes together as one Body. In this part of this letter to the Corinthians, especially in this part which we lift up today, Paul is laying out the do’s and the do not’s for fellowship as a community of faith in regards to their relationship with God and with one another.

The context for our text is that some people have written to Paul seeking clarifications on a few of the challenges facing this community of faith in Corinth. One of these challenges being a disagreement on whether or not it is okay to eat food sacrificed to idols. Many hold the belief that they could eat the food because they knew idols did not exist while other argued that it was wrong, that someone who is new to the faith, might see this and become confused, that this action might even cause someone new to the faith to slip up on their journey.

Think of this argument as the modern day equivalent as whether or not we should wear masks. Each side holding firm, believing that their way is the only way and everyone else is wrong, and that everyone should just follow what they are doing.

The interesting thing to note as we look at this text is that Paul doesn't really pick sides. Rather, he draws on his skills as an excellent debater and lays out his argument step by step, lifting up statements which others have said, pointing out the flaws in people's logic, and ultimately, stating what he holds as Truth which shapes his call as a person of faith.

You see, in the previous chapters, Paul has been laying out how as Christians, we are not called to an individual faith. Rather we are called to a communal faith. Paul argues that as people of faith, we are not to use our own personal liberty at the expense of others. In other words, Paul tells the community at Corinth, that it has never been about them as individuals, that it has always been about us, together as one Body of Christ.

All of this is background for our text today. Paul reminds the community at Corinth of the journey their ancestors took through the wilderness, reminding them how God provided all of them food, how God satisfied all of their thirst, how God gave them all the same instruction yet God was still not pleased with a few of them

because they gave into temptation. They embraced things which strained their relationship with God and with others.

Paul goes on to say that some of them gave into temptation over and over again by making for themselves idols rather than worshipping God, by complaining every step of the way because nothing was ever good enough and worst of all, by testing God's patience because they doubted God's faithfulness.

Paul sums up the section of the letter by reminding the Corinthians that as people who follow Christ, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot make it all about our own wants and needs and still become the people of love that God calls us to be. Instead, we are called to practice a communal faith. And yes, Paul says, it will be difficult. It won't be easy to embrace this call to care especially when the world tells us the only way to get ahead is look only for ourselves. But Paul argues that the way this world thinks is wrong because it goes against the values of the Kingdom of God.

Paul tells this community of faith, that as ones who worship a Savior who showed us time and time again that death and darkness will not have the last word, we are called to build each other up rather than tear each other down. We are called to walk with each other through these tempting times, through these challenging times, through these times which demand that we buy into the false narrative that

we are right and everyone else is wrong. As ones who pray every Sunday on Earth as it is in Heaven, we are called to walk with each other through these times of growth so that the world will know there is another way to be, another way to be in relationship with one another, another way to relate to one another, another way to see each other, another way which brings healing and wholeness, not only for a select few but for all of God's people.

For as Paul tells the Corinthians, tells us today...As ones who follow the Way, the Truth and the Life, ....Don't be callous in your exercise of freedom, thoughtlessly stepping on the toes of those who aren't as free as you are. I try my best to be considerate of everyone's feelings in all these matters; I hope you will be, as well. May it be so. Amen.