For the Glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1

Key Verse: 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

In chapter 8 Paul taught us that we must be careful of exercising our freedom for the sake of others. Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. So, if our freedom causes others to sin, especially those whose conscience is weak, it is better not to use our freedom for the sake of others. In chapter 9 Paul taught us that he gave up all things, all his rights for the sake of the gospel. He had the right to receive support from the church because he was the founder of the church, but he did not claim his rights. Rather, he said that he became all things to all men to save as many as possible. To win the weak, he became weak. To win the Gentile, he adjusted himself to be like the gentiles. He gave up all his rights for the sake of the gospel.

In chapter 10 he warns idolatry and urges us to live for the glory of God. Let’s see what Paul’s message is.

First, warn from Israel’s history (1-13) We study history at school. The purpose of studying history is not only to review our past, but also to realize our present and to preview our future. We learn some lessons from past failures and mistakes of our ancestors so that we may not repeat the same mistakes. In verses 1-10 Paul brings out Israel’s dark history to warn the believers in Corinth Church. The Israelites had been slaves of Egypt under Pharaoh for 430 years. By the power of God, they all passed through the Red Sea. Paul described this in verses 2-4, “***They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ***.” What Paul meant here was that the Israelites had received God’s special grace and blessing. Once the long-term slaves became God’s treasured possessions and a holy nation who would share spiritual blessings as we do now as Christians. But what happened to them? Look at verse 5. “***Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.***” Their start was good, but their ending was bad. They displeased God through their idolatry and rebellion. They all died in the wildness, and no one entered the Promised Land.

The history of Israel gives us lesson that we must live by faith to the end. When we believe in Jesus Christ, we become children of God. We live a spiritual life with Christ Jesus. We eat spiritual food, the word of God, and drink spiritual water, the Holy Spirit, which came from the spiritual rock, Jesus Christ. We must live a spiritual life as people with the Spirit. However, some are tempted by the things of the world and fall into sin and leave their spiritual life and return to their physical life. As a result, their spiritual condition became worse than their previous life without the Spirit. It is the same as Jesus illustrates in Matthew 12:43-45: An impure spirit came out of a person. When the person does not fill his heart with the Holy Spirit, the impure spirit brings seven other evil spirits to this person so that his condition becomes worse than before.

In verses 6-10 Paul warns against idolatry from the Israel’s history and exposes three evil things which they did in the Old Testament. “***Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did***. ***Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry***.” (6-7) These verses illustrate well how God’s people returned to slaves who only sought their physical pleasure. What are the three examples which the Israelites did wrong against God? First, sexual immorality. Look at verse 8. “***We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died***.” (8) This event is written in Numbers 25:1-9. While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The Israelites ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. And God’s anger burned against them, and 24,000 were killed by plagues. Second, we should not test Christ. Look at verse 9. “***We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.***” This story is also written in Numbers 21:4-9 as a story of bronze snake. The Israelites forgot how God had brought them out of slavery of Egypt, and they continued to complain about their inconvenient life in the wilderness. So, God gave venomous snakes to bite all their complaining lips and mouths. Watch out for snakes around you when you complain! Third, do not grumble. Look at verse 10. “***And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.***” This story is written in Numbers 16:41-50. Do not grumble against God or against God’s servant. You will meet not an angel Gabriel, but a destroying angel, which means an agent of God’s judgment.

In verse 11 Paul repeats that all these examples are a warning for those who lived at that time and for us who will live in the future. And he gives us a strong and encouraging statement in verses 12-13. “***So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.***” Amen!

Second, flee from idolatry. (14-22) In chapter 8 Paul said that we are free to eat food sacrificed to idols. This is because we know that idols are nothing, and that there is one God and one Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, food is food but nothing else. But Paul urged Christians not to eat food sacrificed to idols for the sake of others, especially for those whose conscience is weak. If the exercise of our freedom causes others to stumble, we are sinning against God. (8:12) In 10:14 Paul explains why we Christians must not eat food sacrificed to idols which was used for idol feasts. We must flee from idolatry. Paul said that eating food sacrificed to idols is the same as we worship idols. We eat bread and drink wine during the holy communion. This means that we become one with the Lord Jesus by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. When we participate in the ceremony, we proclaim that we are all one in Christ Jesus. (17) Therefore, we who become one with the Christ must not become one with demons by eating food sacrificed to idols. Paul said in verses 20-21, “***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.***” Even though we are free to eat any food, we must not eat food sacrificed to idols because our body is the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Our body cannot take both the flesh and blood of Christ and the food used for idol feasts. This is because we are spiritual beings, and our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Third, for the glory of God (10:23-11:1) Still some believers claim their freedom. They say, “***I have the right to do anything.***” (23) “***The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it***.” (26) But Paul answers, “***but not everything is beneficial”, “but not everything is constructive***.” (23) Paul adds the reason why everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial or constructive in verse 24. Please read verse 24. “***No one should seek their own good, but the good of others***.” Yes, it is for the sake of others. For the sake of others, we must be careful of exercising our freedom. Paul continues to comment on how to consider others in eating food in verses 27-30. If you are invited for a meal, eat whatever is on the table without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of your conscience. (28) Paul meant that it is better not to eat the food in sacrifice than to be criticized by others and be against your conscience. You may claim your freedom and right in saying this, “Why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience?” “Why am I blamed by food which I gave thanks to God?” (29,30) Paul did not blame their exercising their freedom and rights, but he recommended them to yield their freedom to protect others and to build up the church of God.

What was Paul’s conclusion? Paul’s conclusion about the debate is in verse 31. Let us read verse 31. “***So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God***.” Paul meant that before we do something, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we must check if our action or behavior or plan glorifies God or not, if the exercise of our freedom and rights pleases God or not. Indeed, we have the right to do anything, to eat anything, to drink anything, but if it is against God’s glory, we need to give up our rights for the glory of God. As for Paul, to save many people, not seeking his own good, but the good of others, is doing for the glory of God. Look at verse 33. “***even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved***.” As we studied earlier, Paul was ready to give up everything for the sake of the gospel. To save as many as possible, he became all things to all men. For the sake of the gospel and for the glory of God, he did not mind whether his pride was hurt or not, whether he was cheated or not, and whether he suffered or not. He was willing to die for the sake of the gospel and for the glory of God. (Ro 14:8)

What is the gospel? Gospel in Greek means ‘good news.’ Gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again for our eternal life. In the beginning Adam sinned against God. He disobeyed God’s word and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The result of sin is death. Death came to this world because of Adam’s sin. Because of sin this earth was cursed. Sinful people must live in this cursed world until we die and return to dirt because we came from the dirt. But our God is love. He did not give up his people. He sent his Son Jesus to this world as a man and let him die on the cross for our sins. Jesus took all our curse and price of sin and died in our place. He took our punishment in his body to give us freedom. This is not the end of his story. Jesus rose again from the dead and went into heaven. Jesus’ resurrection opened the gate of heaven for us so that we also can go to heaven and to live forever in his kingdom. This is the gospel, and this is the good news for all people of all nations.

Paul used to persecute Jesus and his church. Paul thought that Jesus came to abolish Moses’ law and destroy Hebrew religion. The day he met Jesus who appeared as a light was the day he was on his way to arrest Christians. Jesus who appeared as a light forgave Paul and loved him. Jesus did not punish Paul, but called him. Paul was changed by the love of Jesus. Paul received the forgiveness of sin from Jesus. Since then he was willing to die for Jesus who loved him and gave his life for him.

Sundar Singh was born in Punjab area India. He grew as a follower of Sikh, but because of his Christian mother he was sent to church. When he was fourteen, his mother died. In his anger he burned the Bible in front of his friends. He got lost. He did not know why he had to live. So, he wanted to kill himself and planed to lie down on a train railroad. But the previous night Jesus appeared in his dream. Jesus forgave his sin and gave him new life. Since then, Singh decided to live for Jesus and wanted to become a missionary. His conversion made his father and brothers got mad. His brothers poisoned him several times. His townspeople sent venomous snakes to his bed. But Singh survived and left for the Himalaya to preach the gospel, the love of Jesus.

I did not know who Jesus was before I studied the Bible and received the Holy Spirit. My life was sorrowful and my heart was dark and heavy, because I did not know who I am and why I must live. I thought that death is the end of everything. At that time, I was studying art in a college. I thought that being an artist was the purpose of my life. But nothing and no one taught me the meaning of life and satisfied my empty soul. One day one of my close friends died. I had to watch his funeral ceremony. My sorrow and confusion were deepened. All my paintings were covered with black color. I filled my empty heart with alcohol and smoked cigarettes. Finally, I lost my health and quit my school. I thought that my life was over. But God did not give me up. God gave me a blessing to hear the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. I was invited to a Bible conference. I heard the voice of Jesus, “Father, forgive him, for he does not know where he was going.” God opened my spiritual eyes to see Jesus who was hung on the tree bleeding for my sins. The moment I received Jesus and believed in his name, a great change occurred in my heart. I felt great freedom from the heavy weight of my sin, and inexpressible joy and hope filled my heart. I saw the kingdom of heaven through my eyes. I was converted. When I came out from the conference site, this world looked changed. In the past, this world looked so dark and everything seemed meaningless including my life. But now this world looked so bright with full of meaning. When I touched a leaf of a tree, I felt even the leaf of that tree seemed to have reason to live and meaning to be there. If God gave the reason and meaning for even this leaf to exist, how much more he gave my life with meaning and purpose. I decided to live for the glory of God, who gave me new life. I decided to learn Jesus and follow him. I decided to live new life with new meaning of life. This is my gospel story. This is the reason why I decided to believe in Jesus and follow him until now. Amen

In 2011 Ben West and I had a chance to visit a cemetery in Kwangju Korea, where foreign missionaries were buried, including an American missionary Eugene Bell. His tomb was located just over the hill where Msn Sarah Barry had stayed with other missionaries sent from Southern Presbyterian Church in America. In front of the tomb of Eugene Bell, Ben and I bowed down our heads, revered him, and gave thanks to God for his sacrificial life in Korea. Last week I heard a testimony of missionary Steve Linton, the great, great son of Eugene Bell, who still lives in Korea. According to Mr. Linton, in the early stage of mission in Korea, half of missionaries including their children, died of diseases average within 5 years since they had arrived. Ben and I saw many tombs of children in Yanghwajin in Seoul. At that time going out as a missionary means burying their bones in their mission field. They were willing to sacrifice their lives for the glory of God. They don’t mind of their death for the sake of Korean people. Their sacrificial lives remind me of Romans 14:7-8, “*For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*.” Amen! 128 years later since they had been buried there, Korea became one of the most powerful Christian countries in the world. The seed which they sowed began to blossom and bear fruits. The seed of the gospel were spread to every corner of the Korean peninsula, and it was conveyed to every corner of the world through Korean missionaries in a century. We are one of them. As one of Korean missionaries, I appreciate again for American and Canadian missionaries, including Msn. Sarah Barry, who came to Korea, and taught the gospel, built churches, schools, and hospitals and were buried in Korea.

Paul said in 11:1, “***Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ***.” The common point of all these people above is that they lived for the sake of others. They did not save themselves to save others. Beneath the cross people ridiculed Jesus who was hung on the cross. “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross and save yourself.1” But Jesus did not come down from the cross, but remained there to save us. He did not save himself to save us. Praise Jesus. Paul wanted to follow the example of Jesus. So he repeated saying that we must live for the glory of God and for the sake of others. As Paul followed the example of Christ, let us follow the example of Paul, Sundar Singh, Eugene Bell, Sarah Barry, and many other missionaries who lived and died for the glory of God. Amen!

One word: In the sight of God, for the glory of God!