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# Community Living in Liberty: Part 3

## 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

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How many of you grew up worshipping in a pagan temple? You went regularly to sacrifice a chicken, goat or a calf at the temple of Zeus? Yes, you are really familiar with that world aren't you?

So, when was the last time you stopped by the Temple of Astarte to buy their cut rate ribs and sirloin steaks? How about their really good priced ground chuck? Well, probably not.

For lunch after the service, how many of you are planning to stop at the restaurant in the Temple to Venus to share in the meal they will be serving? I mean, look at the opportunity to show what real Christians are like to all those pagans?

Well, this is how foreign this text sounds to us here in mid-western America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The concern for food around idols and temples comes from Acts 13:19-21 where the apostles formally accepted the Gentile churches. In doing so, James said:

Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, <sup>20</sup> but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. <sup>21</sup> For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

The letter they agreed upon would have been given to the church at Corinth, setting off the controversy we find in this text.

The great concerns of the church at Corinth just don't relate to us very well. But the underlying problems do. Think about these decisions:

Someone really likes my new music CD. Should I make them a copy so they can have it too? All I have to do is rip it to MP3 and copy it.

Should my wife and I go to the Fox and Hounds or to Terry's Tavern for supper? Their food is awesome and I like the lager.

If I visit a Muslim mosque, should I take off my shoes to show respect to Islam?

If I attend a Catholic wedding, should I go through the motions of the service with them and take communion with them?

My co-worker is a Buddhist and has invited me to come to their temple, have a meal with them and talk about religion, including Christianity. Should I go?

I have a friend who has invited me over to share Christ with a Jewish friend. She has fixed pork chops for supper. What do I do?

My unsaved friend offers me a crystal which she bought in Sedona and has been blessed by a Shaman. Do I accept it?

Wow, all of these are really hard. Some should not be at all. But I suspect that most of you either don't see why some of these decisions are hard. Shoot, why wouldn't we with just about all of them? OK, now we are talking about similar issues as what we are reading in the text we have before us.

Now it has been a bit since we were talking about our Christian liberty and were looking at 1 Corinthians 8. So what is going on here?

- In chapter 8, Paul **instructs** the giving up of one's liberty in view of edification. There is a warning to the experienced believers to anchor their knowledge in love.
- In chapter 9, Paul **illustrates** the giving up of ones liberty in view of evangelism. There is a warning to the experienced believers to accept diversity in the work of ministry.
- In chapter 10, Paul **implements** the exercise of ones liberty in view of experience. There is a warning to the experienced believers to be aware how their liberty may lead to license.

So watch carefully how Paul develops this implementation in liberty.

## **The Pattern of Failure to be Avoided (v.1-13)**

The apostle begins by taking us back into the Old Testament to warn us that identifying with God's people and participating in spiritual privilege do not guarantee individual purity.

<sup>1</sup> For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup> Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." <sup>8</sup> We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup> We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, <sup>10</sup> nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

## **Spiritual Privileges of God's People (v.1-4)**

These were the grand spiritual privileges that the Israelites experienced. They were delivered from their slavery and their enemies by the presence of God with

them and identified with Moses by passing through the sea. They participated in Christ by drinking the water and eating the manna with its spiritual, topological significance. Paul is seeing the Old Testament as salvation history and interpreting it in the light of the church's ordinances.

### **Sobering Problem for God's People (v.5)**

If this was their privilege, why are their bodies scattered across the wilderness? In spite of all that God had done for them in visible demonstrations of His presence, provision and power, He was not pleased with them.

### **Sinful Practice of God's People (v.6-11)**

Paul says that the recorded history of Israel is written for us to observe and learn not to imitate their sinful desires and actions. He draws on several incidents all of which were true in Corinth. The church there was guilty of the same sins that Israel had committed.

Their idolatry (v.7) is compared to Exodus 32:6 and exposed in 1 Corinthians 8.

Their immorality (v.8) is compared to Numbers 25 and exposed in 1 Corinthians 6.

Their testing God (v.9) is compared to Numbers 21 and exposed in 1 Corinthians 10:22.

Their grumbling (v.10) is compared to Numbers 16 and exposed in 2 Corinthians 12.

Verse 11 reminds us forcibly that the Old Testament is profitable in powerful ways for the New Covenant believer. Israel sinned under Law and that was bad. It is even worse to sin under grace in this final age of redemptive history.

### **Significant Provision for God's People (v.12-13)**

What does it mean for us that God's people experiencing spiritual privilege can be under God's displeasure because of their sinful practice?

We are warned against spiritual pride (v.12) It is just when we think that we are most secure and safe that we standing on the slipperiest ground.

We are encouraged for spiritual purity (v.13). This is a statement of the facts as well as a promise. No Christian is ever in a situation where the only choice is to sin.

- No temptation is ever too strong for the believer.
- Every temptation may be escaped and endured by the believer.

So here it is. The experienced believer must understand that his very experience of spiritual privileges does not make him immune to temptation. All believers must take heart in their temptation for there is a way to avoid sin.

So, now what? How does this relate to their liberty? Well, the exercise of their liberty was tempting some to commit idolatry. They were having to make decisions that took into account eating and participating in pagan rituals.

## **The Prohibition of Dining to be Accepted (v.14-22)**

Paul carefully divides the question they have written about into two parts. Can we buy and eat meat sacrificed to idols which is being sold in the temple market? Can we go to meals served at the pagan temple? These verses are dealing with the second question: is it sin to go to the pagan temple for a meal? Now we really don't care about this question much today. But we need to observe Paul's method of reflecting on the circumstances and the Scripture as he makes application.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup> I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. <sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup> Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? <sup>19</sup> What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup> Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

### **Precept - The Sin They Are Confronted With (v.14)**

The experienced believers understood that they could eat meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols. The meat itself was not affected by being sacrificed because neither the meat nor the idol are anything in themselves. However, they could not eat at the pagan temples. This would cause them to participate in the pagan ritual making them idolaters.

### **Process - The Situation They Are Tempted In (v.15-20)**

Paul's thinking in this chapter is based on Deuteronomy 32, verses 15-18 in particular. We cannot read or expound on that whole important *Song of Moses*. Focus then on verses 15-18.

<sup>15</sup> "But Jeshurun [Israel] grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. <sup>16</sup> They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. <sup>17</sup> They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. <sup>18</sup> You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth. [Deuteronomy 32:15-18 (ESV)]

This is a very complicated argument. Let us try to follow it, not in the form that Paul presents it, but in a form more accessible to us.

When we partake of the cup and the bread in communion we are sharing or fellowshiping with Christ in a spiritual way.

When the Israelite ate the sacrifices they brought to the Temple, they were sharing or fellowshiping with God at the altar.

What is offered to idols and the idol itself are nothing. The reflects what he has taught in 1 Corinthians 8. He is not investing any magical or spiritual reality to the objects themselves.<sup>6</sup>

What the Israelite sacrificed [to idols], they were really sacrificing and therefore fellowshiping with demons, not God.<sup>7</sup>

They were not to open themselves to sharing in or fellowshiping with demons.

You cannot take the Lord's Table and eat at the idol's table.

So, a believer cannot partake of the Lord's Table and the idol's table without exposing himself to danger and provoking the Lord.

Paul is in sense reflecting on the very examples he has given in verses 6-10 and anticipating his discussion of the seriousness of the Lord's Table in Chapter 11.

### **Point - The Solution to Their Dilemma (v.21-22)**

The conclusion then is simply that a believer was faced with a choice: fellowship with God in Communion or fellowship with demons by dining at the temple's table. It was choice between God and Satan. That is why this section starts with the injunction: flee idolatry.

There are so many applications of this today. Loved ones, you cannot participate in any activity where idolatry or the occult is involved. This will mean no astrology, no occult games, no D&D style games, no music or concerts where the text of the words worships or affirms Satan or Satanic themes, no involvement in oriental or new age mystical techniques of meditation, relaxation, or exercise. These are clearly ways in which the modern Christian can "dine at the pagan table fellowshiping with demons."

So the careful thought and application of a Biblical principle has dealt with one side of the question. Now, how do we deal with the other issues of liberty which do not involve us in spiritual danger and provocation of the Lord?

## **The Practice of Liberty to be Adopted (v.23-30)**

In the light of all that has gone before how do we implement this in our daily practice. Since we are not, in our culture, directly affected by the particular problem here, I want to glean through this as a summary of the principles to guide us through our own practice of Christian liberty. We have seen what was forbidden and is not under liberty. But now, Paul addresses what is allowed and is under liberty.

In essence, you may not eat at the pagan temple's restaurant. But, you may eat at home what is bought at the pagan temple's market. This may sound like a lot of religious hair-splitting but many of the decisions we make are finely grained like this.

## **The Correction of our Attitudes (v.23-24)**

First, Paul needs to correct their attitude.

<sup>23</sup> "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. <sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

### **Response to their Statement (v.23)**

Their attitude is evident in the statement they have made: "all things are lawful". Now, everything may be permissible", however there are two important, liberty-limiting principles.

Not everything is profitable for me in pleasing God - self directed. There are some things we are free to do that will not be helpful, profitable or to our spiritual advantage.

Not everything is edifying for others in pleasing God - others directed. There are times when what I am free to do will not build other Christians up and is therefore to be carefully weighed.

### **Reason for his Tests (v.24)**

The phrase "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" is one which Paul brings to the Christian's attention often. Our primary concern is the good of others, not our own good. We saw in Romans 15:2 how important it is in our Christian liberty to be mindful of others. Philippians 2:3-4, reminds us, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

## **The Circumstances of Their Application (v.25-30)**

### **General Rule - Broadest Application (v.25-27)**

<sup>25</sup> Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. <sup>26</sup> For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." <sup>27</sup> If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

This statement is to cover situations in the market place. It may be aimed particularly at Jewish believers. When you are with people, don't ask whether this is kosher or not. Don't be the source of limiting another person's liberty. When you are with unbelievers, don't get your personal religious practice in

the way of a gospel relationship. Retrain your conscience to eat whatever is put in front of you.

The statement of the principle (v.25) is one of the New Covenant realities. All foods are acceptable now because we do not live under the Old Covenant and its dietary restrictions. We live under the New Covenant.

The support for the principle (v.26) is drawn from Psalm 24:1; 50:12. Paul reflects this language in 1 Timothy 4:1-5, which says:

<sup>1</sup> Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

### **Guiding Exception - Particular Application (v.28-30)**

<sup>28</sup> But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— <sup>29</sup> I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? <sup>30</sup> If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

This paragraph covers the situation where a believer is in the home of an unbeliever and someone points out that the food is sacrificed meat. Do we then, as Christians, simply assert that we are free? No, Paul says in this situation we are not to eat, even if we are giving up our liberty for the sake of the conscience of another (possibly for the sake of another [kind of, that is unconverted] conscience.)

Two questions which arise: one pointing to what he has just said and one pointing to what he is going to say.

- Why should I be judged by another's conscience?
- Why should I be slandered when I am thankful for the food and have given thanks for it?

The answer is in the following.

## **The Principles of Liberty Affirmed (v.31-11:1)**

The whole teaching on liberty can be wrapped up in these concluding principles.

<sup>31</sup> So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. <sup>32</sup> Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, <sup>33</sup> just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

<sup>1</sup> Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

### **The Objective of Glory to God (v.31)**

Do everything you do so as to reflect the worth and value of God in Christ. No matter what you do, govern your behavior guided so that God can and does receive glory.

### **The Goal of Offense to None (v.32)**

Too many commentators make too much of this tri-fold distinction laying it down as a comprehensive and conclusive division of all people. That is not his point in the context at all. There were Jews and Gentiles with their own cultural and ethnic heritage which they were to be sensitive to. There were Christians to defer to. Therefore, in our liberty, we must be aware of the impact on the cultural and ethnic diversity both in and outside the church.

### **The Effort of Profit to the Lost (v.33)**

Evangelism has a large part in shaping what we do and do not do. If we are merely trying to please ourselves, we will lose our evangelistic fervor and effectiveness. Paul is ever mindful of the impact of his attitudes and actions on the lost he is around. So this limiting of liberty will help maintain personal purity, keep believers from being encouraged to violate their consciences and keep the door open for the gospel to unbelievers.

### **The Identification of Models to Emulate (11:1)**

The example of Christ is mediated through men whose lives shape and mold us as we pattern ourselves after their following of Christ, the King. In His own ministry, Jesus showed us how to live in liberty *while He was still under the Old Covenant*. Paul shows us how to live in liberty in the New Covenant.

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## Reflect and Respond

We must be very careful that our liberty does not become sin. Spiritual privilege is no guarantee of spiritual purity.

Discerning where liberty ends and license begins requires deep reflection on the Scripture and careful consideration of our culture.

All assertions of liberty must be grounded in the Scripture. Notice how often, when stating their liberty, he connects it to particular texts.

Particular applications of principles in the Scripture give us guidelines on how we are to apply those same principles in our situations.

In all areas of liberty we must ask the following questions:

1. Am I sufficiently aware of the pitfalls?
2. Is it profitable to me?
3. Is it edifying to others?
4. Does it glorify God?
5. Is it offensive within my cultural setting?
6. Does it build or burn bridges in evangelism?
7. Does it follow Christ-like models?

May God be pleased to give us such a spirit of grace in our liberty that we will exalt God, edify one another and evangelize the lost.

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## Notes

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<sup>6</sup> This is a very important point. Paul is careful to point out that he is not implying some mystical spiritual reality to the physical elements, either to the meat in the Old Covenant rituals, in the pagan sacrifices nor in the Christian Communion. What is significant is not the element itself, but who or what is being communed with. We must NOT miss the significance of this in the flow of the argument. What follows next in Chapter 11 is exposing error in the church in regards to head covering and to the Lord's Table. Paul is moving naturally and seamlessly through these subjects, building layer upon layer as he goes.

<sup>7</sup> Possibly, "When a pagan eats the sacrifices at table in the temple he is sharing in or fellowshiping with demons, not God."