

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor_Chap10B)

BRIEF REVIEW & RECAP

As observed in our study of the first half of chapter 10, Paul began in chapter 8 to address the broader subject of the liberty of the Christian to enjoy the things of this world – all in the context of issues specific to the local church in Corinth during the middle of the 1st Century A.D. Paul’s discourse on these specific issues occupies his narrative from chapter 8:1 thru 11:1 and his discourse falls into the following categories:

- The conscience of the believer in areas of Christian liberty – Meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-13)
- His example of sacrificing his liberty even though he is an apostle (9:1-27)
- The danger of idolatry (10:1-22)
- Restrictions on the exercise of Christian liberty (10:23-11:1)

In *chapter 8*, Paul laid a foundation for his response to their question regarding the eating of meat that had been associated with sacrifices to idols. In that chapter, he explained that the conscience of the believer was the real issue since the idol was in reality nothing as many evidently understood. Nevertheless, there was a responsibility that the believer with the “strong conscience” had toward the believer with the “weak conscience” in this matter.

In *chapter 9*, Paul uses himself as an example of how he had exercised this principle in so many other areas of life. As an apostle, the world and the carnal minded believer would have perceived such actions as weakness instead of indicative of power and authority.

This is a perfect illustration of the principle that God’s ways and methods are not the ways of the world and fallen man. In God’s economy, it is from the “meek,” the “humble,” and the low in status in this world from which God’s leaders always emerge. Even then, it is not the “meek,” the “humble,” and the “low in status” as the world defines such people – all for the purpose of advancing a political agenda based upon class warfare. It is the “spiritually meek,” the “spiritually humble,” who are generally from among those who are lacking in any worldly notoriety and means that God can advance His purpose.

The reason: these individuals have fully internalized God’s value system and purposes so that their identity is that of Christ glorification rather than self-promotion and approbation. They are “occupied with Christ.” They see this world and the things of this world through a spiritual set of lens that puts the *illusion* of the cosmic matrix in proper perspective so that the *reality* of what God is accomplishing in human history becomes the panorama against which all things are evaluated.

When the believer has fully internalized Truth, then the cynicism, the disappointment with unrealistic expectations having not been met in relationships and systems of this world, and the bitterness that results from carnal (fleshly) old man influenced thinking is replaced with orientation to reality. That reality puts life in this world (including all relationships) in proper perspective.

Paul’s orientation to spiritual reality allowed him to rise above the carnal mind’s demand for self-gratification within the context of liberties that would have been totally legitimate. This principle can be extended to so many areas in life and when “actualization” into the believer’s life occurs, such believers become “invisible heroes” from the standpoint of the world.

In chapter 10, Paul turns to Israel's past as another example. However, in this case, the example is not a positive one like that of Paul's life (chapter 9). The main point of chapter 10 is this – "Corinthian believers, we share the same spiritual foundation of belief in Jesus Christ. Do not become so oriented to the illusion of the things of this world which you have a right to enjoy so that you allow those things to effectively become an idol that is the all-consuming object of your affection and attention."

In verses 1-13 of chapter 10, Paul begins to lay a foundation for his warning against idolatry in verses 14-22. In verses 1-13, Paul summarizes Israel's rebellion against God's gracious provision during the wilderness wandering as an example for the Corinthians of how believers can turn to idolatry. Paul notes that at the heart of their turn to idolatry was grumbling against the Lord and His appointed leaders (v. 10). Paul highlights this particular point because essentially the same issue had manifested itself in Corinth in the form of the sectarianism that Paul addressed in chapters 1-4. The presence of the same catalyst in the Corinthians as had existed amongst the Israelites was what prompted Paul to issue this warning against the abuse of the Christian liberty. Since an idol was nothing to those whose conscience was "strong," they could eat the meat from a sacrificial animal that was sold in the marketplace (chapter 8). However, if they took that liberty too far, they might find themselves compromising themselves and their witness by actually participating in pagan religious ceremonies – acts of idolatry just like the Israelites had done in the wilderness.

All of this is the context for Paul's statements in verses 12-13 – "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*" Paul was reminding them that whenever the believer faces temptation, God allows the temptation, but He also provides a way of addressing the temptation. The temptation does not come from God as James makes clear.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (Jas 1:13)

However, the way of escape does come from God. Specific to the issue of participation in feasts that were part of idolatrous rituals, God's alternative is the observance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:14ff).

BEWARE OF IDOLATRY (1 COR 10:14-22)

14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. 16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? 19 What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. 21 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. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

Here Paul highlights the fact that there is the danger of going a step beyond just eating the meat of part of an animal that had been killed to be a sacrificial offering to an idol. The next step would be joining unbelievers in their sacrificial feasts in their pagan temples. To do this would be participating in idolatry.

Paul illustrates this by reminding them that participation in the Lord's Supper signifies that the believer is in communion – that is in a sharing relationship (*koinonia*) – with the Savior. So participation in idol feasts in pagan temples means communion with the idol that is the central part of these pagan rituals and sacrificial feasts. This is the mistake Israel made.

Christians today must discern how the illustration applies to their own lives. One example is participation in Halloween activities and even certain secular traditions surrounding Christmas and Easter. What about sports activities and all that surrounds those venues? What about dancing and other entertainment venues? What about Las Vegas, Nevada, Shreveport, Louisiana and Atlantic City, New Jersey? What about the manufacture and selling of alcoholic beverages such as beer and wine or tobacco products? What about employment in the advertising industry or the modeling of certain types of clothing? What about college sororities and fraternities? These are just a few examples of areas in which Christians with a strong conscience can be involved to a certain extent, but where involvement past a point becomes sinful or even tantamount to idolatry.

In verse 15 (“*I speak as to wise men*”), Paul uses a tiny bit of sarcasm. The Corinthians (as Greeks) were notorious for their desire for knowledge and wisdom. This is evidenced in Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:22 – “*For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom.*”

In verses 16-17, Paul is asking rhetorical questions in order to highlight some points upon which he wishes to build in his logical flow of argument.

- In the Lord's Supper, there is a vertical element and a horizontal element involved.
- Fellowship with the Lord may be symbolized by the drinking from the cup.
- Fellowship amongst believers may be symbolized by the eating of the bread.
- Pagan feasts and rituals emphasized both dimensions as well.
- Paul described the cup as a cup of blessing, a common Jewish expression for the last cup of wine drunk at meals.
- The Jews used it as a kind of toast to God for His goodness.
- However, Paul turned this around by saying we bless the cup.
- That is, we give thanks to God for the cup because of what it symbolizes, namely, our sharing in the benefits of Christ's shed blood (cf. 11:25).
- In like manner, our sharing together in the bread of communion (*koinonia*) or fellowship is symbolic of our common participation in the benefits of the slain body of Jesus Christ (cf. 11:24).
- The emphasis in these verses is upon the union all believer's share in Christ – a union which precludes all other spiritual unions with forces opposed to that primary union such as demons.
- Paul will develop the idea of the unity of the Body of Christ in chapter 12:14-27.

In verse 18, Paul highlights the fact that when the Israelites involved themselves in idolatry and took part in pagan religious feasts, they were identifying themselves with everything that the pagan altar represented – including the demon that was behind the idol.

Verses 19-22 are designed to address the argument that Paul may have been contradicting himself since in chapter 8, he had argued that idols were nothing, yet here, he is warning that they are in fact something, namely demons.

The Israelites provoked the Lord to jealousy by doing just such a thing when they joined in Moabite worship (Num. 25; cf. Deut. 32:17, 21-22).

While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel. 4 The LORD said to

Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." 5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor." 6 Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. 9 Those who died by the plague were 24,000. 10 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 12 "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'" 14 Now the name of the slain man of Israel who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's household among the Simeonites. 15 The name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was head of the people of a father's household in Midian. 16 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 17 "Be hostile to the Midianites and strike them; 18 for they have been hostile to you with their tricks, with which they have deceived you in the affair of Peor and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of the leader of Midian, their sister who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor." (Num 25)

17 "They sacrificed to demons who were not God,
To gods whom they have not known,
New gods who came lately,
Whom your fathers did not dread.
18 "You neglected the Rock who begot you,
And forgot the God who gave you birth.
19 "The LORD saw this, and spurned them
Because of the provocation of His sons and daughters.
20 "Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end shall be;
For they are a perverse generation,
Sons in whom is no faithfulness.
21 'They have made Me jealous with what is not God;
They have provoked Me to anger with their idols
So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,
22 For a fire is kindled in My anger,
And burns to the lowest part of Sheol,
And consumes the earth with its yield,
And sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. (Deut 32:17-22)

Paul has and is indicating that Israel's experiences are object lessons for the believer. We are not stronger than the Lord. In fact, we are totally dependent upon Him. The attitude of independence from the Lord is at the root of all sin and failure. It was the root of Satan's moral fall. So, Paul argues that it would be foolish to provoke the Lord – unless we are stronger than He. If we do provoke Him and we are not indeed stronger than He, we can count on the fact that we will be disciplined by Him.

RESTRICTIONS ON THE EXERCISE OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (1 COR 10:23-11:1)

23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. 25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; 26 FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? 31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

11:1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

In order to assist these believers in making the distinction between what was a legitimate use of one's liberty or freedom and that which was not, Paul provides some guidance. Paul argues that meat eaten at an idol feast is associated with pagan worship and is contaminated. However, meat that is sold in the public meat market has lost its religious significance and is not an issue.

The Greek word that is translated "meat market" in verse 25 is *makellon* (from Gr. μακελλω). This is a reference to a physical structure and location north of Corinth that existed in Paul's day.

The word *makellon* ("meat market," v. 25) has interesting connections in Corinth. Near the Lechaem Road, the paved footroad leading north from Corinth toward the western part of Lechaem...a commercial building has been excavated. It has a paved court, which was surrounded by colonnades and small shops.

Broneer...relates that in the pavement of one shop a marble slab has been found, and claims it is inscribed with the Latin word for market and that this word has been transliterated in the Greek text of v. 25. But J. Schneider, in TDNT [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*], 4:370-372, says that the word *makellon* is of Greek origin, occurring on a building inscription in Epidauros about 400 B.C., though it appears in Roman inscriptions in Italy and in Latin-speaking colonies more than in Greek on Greek inscriptions.

The word means "food market" as well as "meat market," which was a part of the *makellon*. Excavations have revealed the plan of such markets: a rectangular, columned court with a central fountain and a dome-shaped roof supported by columns and with booths on the sides and porticoes in front of them. According to Schneider (ibid.), the food market at Pompeii had on the east side an imperial cult area, embellished with statues, and in the southeast area there seems to have been a room for sacrificial meals.

Cadbury argues...that the *makellon* - meat market mentioned on the inscription found in Corinth was in existence in Paul's day, and so this establishment could be the very one Paul is referring to, where meat previously offered in sacrifice to

idols was being sold. As has been said, this meat no longer retained its religious significance and was really all right to eat.¹

It is quite apparent that the nature of the Corinthian's argument for eating at the temples (8:1, 4, 8) and their criticism of Paul (9:1-3, 19-23) have revealed a basic confusion between *essentials* and *nonessentials*. The Corinthians had tried to make attendance at pagan religious feasts in the pagan temple to be a *nonessential*. At the same time, they had confused the true basis for Christian behavior. For them it was a question of knowledge and rights (*gnosis* and *exousia*). However, for Paul, such actions involved the very essentials of the Christian faith since such activity was tantamount to idolatry and identification and union with the idol. For Paul it is a question of love (*agape*) and freedom (*eleutheria*).

Earlier Paul had addressed the issue of Christian liberty and had said that all things were lawful for him, but all things were not beneficial (6:12). Now he went further and clarified that beneficial means beneficial for others, not just self. So Paul was seeking to bring the rights-conscious Corinthians to their knees. The Corinthians viewed their freedom as an opportunity to pursue their own interests. Paul viewed it as an opportunity to benefit and build up another person.

In approving of a believer joining an unbeliever at the latter's house (not the pagan temple) for dinner (v. 27), Paul has in mind a scenario in which the believer provides a witness to the unbeliever through gracious interaction over a meal. It was wise not to ask if someone had offered the meat to an idol. Not inquiring would obviate the possibility of unnecessary guilt arising in the mind of a scrupulous believer. If, however, at the dinner someone (maybe a fellow Christian; cf. v. 29a) points out that the meat was offered to an idol, then the believer is to refrain from eating the meat. The reason for the restraint is that in those circumstances, it would be better to keep the focus upon the essentials (the gospel) in front of the unbeliever instead of getting into a discussion the purpose of which is to justify the believer's freedom to be involved in a non-essential.

Paul asks a rhetorical question – why he should be condemned for partaking of something in the meal for which he could really thank God. The logic of this self-restraint is this. By exercising self-restraint and voluntarily abstaining from eating of the meat, the believer with the stronger conscience has protected his “right” to exercise his liberty (a nonessential) while at the same time demonstrating love for the unbeliever by maintaining a focus upon preserving the essential – the gospel message.

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976-1992), electronic edition.