

## Lesson 14

### I. Review of Chapter 8

- A. As we discussed in Lesson 12, some commentators interpret Paul's statements in Chapter 8 as agreeing with the Corinthians that they had the right to eat meat in an idol's temple.
1. These commentators have a big problem when they get to Chapter 10 because in this chapter Paul will very clearly prohibit such activity. How do they explain the discrepancy?
    - a) Some argue that Chapter 10 is addressed to a different audience than Chapter 8. They say that Chapter 8 addressed the strong, and Chapter 10 addressed the weak. We discussed the problems with this view in Lesson 12. As you recall, Paul never mentions the strong at all, and he never mentions the weak in Chapter 10.
    - b) Others argue that Chapter 10 doesn't really belong in this letter. One commentator argued that Chapter 10 came from an earlier "more Jewish" letter -- a ridiculous assertion!
  2. The best explanation for the discrepancy is that there is no discrepancy. Chapters 8-10 all belong to this letter, and they all have the exact same message with regard to idolatry -- it is something a Christian must flee. Paul never agreed that anyone had the right to eat in a temple dedicated to a false god, not in Chapter 8 and (as we will see) certainly not in Chapter 10.

### II. Verses 1-13: Warnings From History

- A. **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; <sup>2</sup> And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; <sup>3</sup> And did all eat the same spiritual meat; <sup>4</sup> And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. <sup>7</sup> Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. <sup>8</sup> Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. <sup>9</sup> Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. <sup>10</sup> Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. <sup>12</sup> Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup> There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but

will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.

**B.** Paul's use of the phrase "our fathers" in verse 1 is very important.

1. He clearly regards his Corinthian converts (Jews and Gentiles) to be the sons and daughters of those whom God dealt with in the Old Testament.
2. Gentiles may be "wild olive shoots" as Paul explains in Romans 11:17, but they have been grafted in and are now part of the tree.
3. Paul's entire argument here is based on the presupposition that the Corinthian Christians stand in continuity with what God has done in the past, and he affirms this point in the first verse.
4. As you recall, the issue of eating meat offered to an idol was exclusively a Gentile issue, and "Paul addresses these Gentiles as if they were Israelites, the covenanted and holy people of God."
5. Today we, too, should see the Old Testament Biblical history as the history of "our fathers" and not simply the history of the fathers of the Jews. The Old Testament is a Christian book because it has Christ as its prime actor and its final goal.
6. This attitude contrasts dramatically with the attitude of the Jews toward new converts to Judaism. They taught the new convert not to pray "Our God and God of our fathers" but instead to pray "Our God and the God of their fathers." Paul rejected any such distinction in the church.

**C.** In verses 1-4, Paul listed the spiritual blessings that were enjoyed by the Jews during the Exodus.

1. (Verse 1) They were all under the cloud.
  - a) The word "all" is repeated five times in these verses to emphasize that this was something they all experienced. It may also be meant to preempt the argument that only the weak fell in the wilderness or that those who fell were those who missed out on the blessings. In any event, it makes it difficult to argue that Paul is speaking in Chapter 10 to only a subgroup of the church.
  - b) The cloud denoted God's protection. Psalm 105:30 describes it as a covering.
2. (Verse 1) They all passed through the sea.
  - a) This blessing of course recalls God deliverance of the people as they

crossed the sea on dry ground.

3. (Verse 2) They were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.
  - a) Paul now begins to compare God's deliverance of the Jews with God's deliverance of the Corinthians. The Jews were delivered when they passed through water leaving their bondage behind.
  - b) Peter in 1 Peter 3:20-21 makes a similar comparison to the flood, in which Noah and his family were delivered by their passage through water, and he concludes that baptism likewise saves us.
  - c) The phrase "baptized into Moses" has no Jewish parallels and seems to have been coined by Paul from the phrase "baptized into Christ."
  - d) When we combine Paul's example and Peter's example with all that the Bible says about our baptism, the result is inescapable -- our baptism marks the beginning of our new life in Christ.
    - (1) The Jews' new life began when they crossed the Red Sea. Noah's new life began when he passed through the flood waters in the ark. Our new life begins when we pass through the waters of baptism.
    - (2) Romans 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.
    - (3) The sea marked the permanent boundary between Israel and Egypt. Israel's deliverance through the sea marked the beginning of their separation from Egypt and their new identity as God's covenant community.
  - e) Paul's illustrations here lay the groundwork for his argument: All Israel experienced God's saving deliverance under Moses, but they did not all reach the final goal. Why? Because of their flagrant sin; because of their idolatry.
    - (1) They were all blessed, but those blessings did not automatically exempt them from God's judgment when they openly disobeyed God and rejected his commands. Paul's entire argument here is that the Corinthians are in danger of committing the same sin and experiencing the same judgment.
  - f) Egypt held the Jews in bondage, and Egypt was full of idolatry. The Jews left that bondage and that idolatry behind when they crossed the sea and were covered by the cloud. The Corinthians, too, should have left all of that behind when they came out of the waters of baptism.
4. (Verses 3-4) They ate the same spiritual meat and drank the same spiritual

drink.

- a) Not only did the Jews have something analogous to baptism, but they had something analogous to the Lord's supper.
  - b) Paul identifies the gift of manna as the spiritual bread, and the water from the rock as the spiritual drink.
5. (Verse 4) The drink came from the rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.
- a) Paul uses the word "spiritual" three times here -- spiritual meat, spiritual drink, and spiritual rock. The food and drink provided by God during the Exodus provided more than just physical sustenance; it also provided spiritual sustenance. The term also denotes the source of the meat, the drink, and the rock -- it all came from God.
  - b) Many commentators believe that the Corinthians had developed a superstitious view of baptism and the Lord's supper -- that it magically made them invulnerable to the power of demons and idols, and thus enabled them to dine in an idol's temple without any fear of falling.
    - (1) But the Corinthians did not appear to view idolatry as something from which they needed any protection or immunity. They did not seem to view their actions as dangerous or wrong. Paul in verse 1 says that he does not want them to be ignorant; they were unaware of the extreme danger they were in.
  - c) The statement that the rock followed them is puzzling.
    - (1) The Old Testament does not say anything about the rock traveling with the Israelites, from which they continued to draw their water -- but the text lends itself to this inference.
    - (2) The rock is mentioned twice -- once at the beginning of their journey in Exodus 17 and once at the end in Numbers 20. With 40 years of wandering, God must have provided them with water more than just these two times.
    - (3) If the rock of Exodus 17 and the rock of Numbers 20 are one and the same, then this rock must have accompanied the Israelites through their journey.
    - (4) In any event, Paul writing under inspiration settles the question of whether the rock followed them -- it did. And that point has an important theological implication for Paul's argument -- the following rock denotes God's continued graciousness and blessings during the wilderness wanderings. And that divine source of spiritual blessings, that rock, was Christ.
  - d) What does it mean that the rock was Christ?
    - (1) "Rock" was a title used for God in the Song of Moses in Deut. 32, a song that

forms the foundation for Paul's argument in this section.

- (2) The figures "the Rock of salvation," "the Rock that begot you," "our Rock," and "my rock and my redeemer" are all found in Old Testament descriptions of God and all transfer easily to Christ.
- (3) In Deut 32:15, one who returned to idolatry was said to have "forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation."
- (4) In the opening lines of this letter (1:4-7), Paul affirms that Christ is the source of all our spiritual blessings. Like the Israelites, we too have a rock, and our rock is Christ.
  - (a) The rock is more proof of the continuity between Israel and the Corinthians. Israel rejected the rock of their salvation by returning to idolatry and mixing their idols with the worship of God, and the Corinthians were in danger of doing the same thing.

**D. (Verse 5) Deliverance from Egypt did not mean ultimate deliverance.**

- 1. Israel had to pass through a time of testing in the wilderness before they could enter the promised land. In the same way, the deliverance of a Christian does not mean that he is whisked away to safety and can skip the perilous wilderness journey. We face the same dangers and temptations in our pagan wilderness that foiled the Israelites.
- 2. The word "but" in verse 5 reveals that what happened to Israel was counter to what one would have expected after they received so many divine blessings. That God was not pleased with most of them was an understatement since only two (Joshua and Caleb) survived to enter the promised land. The others were overthrown in the wilderness; literally, they were strewn about in the wilderness.
- 3. Despite the spiritual benefits that the Israelites enjoyed, they did not reach Canaan because their "post-baptismal" sins were so great. The lesson for the Corinthians is that failure is possible, and that it remains possible even though they have received so many blessings from God. Paul will next pinpoint the precise cause of Israel's failure.

**E. (Verse 6) In verse 6, Paul links the divine blessings in verses 1-4 with the subsequent punishments for disobedience.**

- 1. These events happened as examples. The Greek word is typos, and it refers to a mold for producing a shape or a wooden stamp for making an imprint in clay. These examples are intended to guide us. If we make the same mistakes, then we can expect the same results.
  - a) If you have ever taken a physics class you have probably seen a video of

the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapse of 1940. The bridge, innovative in its design, was a short-lived source of civic pride. After the collapse, the Governor of Washington told the citizens in a radio address not to despair- he said: *the state would build the exact same bridge in the exact same way in the exact same place.* An engineering professor sent him a telegram that read: If you build the exact same bridge in the exact same way in the exact same place it will fall down exactly like the other one.

**2. Romans 15:4** For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

**a)** The Scriptures do not offer only hope; they also contains warnings. They were written for our learning. Paul's discussion here presupposes that his largely Greek audience had some knowledge of these Old Testament events, which indicates that he must have used them in his teaching and preaching -- and that too is a lesson for us today. The best commentary on the New Testament is the Old Testament (and vice versa). When we ignore the Old Testament it makes it very difficult to properly understand the New Testament -- and with some books (Revelation, for example) it makes them impossible to understand.

**b)** Paul wants the Corinthians to heed the warnings of Scripture. They have left the starting block as the elect of God, but they are not yet in the promised land. They, like Israel, are in the wilderness with an array of dangers surrounding them. And they, like Israel, will not be exempt from God's judgment simply because they have received great spiritual blessings. They, like Israel, can fall.

**3.** First, and foremost, the Israelites were cravers after evil.

**a)** When the Israelites grew tired of the spiritual manna and began to grumble, God sent them quail to eat. But before they could even swallow the quail, God struck them with a great plague. Here is how the KJV describes the situation:

**(1)** Numbers 11:33-34 And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. 34 And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted.

**(2)** And what does Kibroth-hattaavah mean? It means "graves of craving." They craved evil. Paul connects their craving for evil with the Corinthians craving to eat meat in idol temples.

**F.** (Verse 7) In these next five verses, Paul outlines four of Israel's transgressions that resulted from the basic sin of "craving" and that broke their relationship with

God: idolatry, harlotry, putting Christ to the test, and grumbling.

1. Paul is not simply compiling a catalog of sins, but he is listing sins that specifically apply to the Corinthian situation.
2. Of the four warnings from the wilderness experience in this section, verse 7 contains the only explicit quotation from scripture -- (Exodus 32:6b) "and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Why does Paul highlight this verse?
  - a) It is interesting that he does not cite a verse emphasizing their worship and sacrifice before the golden calf (as, for example, the first half of Exodus 32:6), but he chooses instead to cite the eating, drinking, and playing that followed their idolatry.
  - b) The text indicates that the people ate and drank in the presence of the golden calf, and thus it ties into Paul's point that eating in the presence of an idol is itself idolatry. He wants to drive home the point that willingly participating in idolatry in any way has dire consequences.

**G.** (Verse 8) In verse 8, Paul says, let us not commit fornication.

1. The phrase "rose up to play" has sexual overtones. Paul's exhortation against immorality in verse 8 (and elsewhere in the letter) may indicate that the Corinthian idolatrous rites may also have involved sexual sin.
2. But Paul's warning may refer here to a metaphorical harlotry. In the minds of most Jews, sexual immorality and idolatry were two sides of the same coin, and Israel was often said to be playing the harlot when it practiced idolatry.
3. Paul is probably alluding here to Numbers 25, which recounts the people having sexual relations with the women of Moab and then being invited to sacrifice to their gods. Verse 2 tells us "the people ate and bowed down to their gods." God sent a plague that verse 9 tells us killed 24,000 people.
4. But here we have a problem. Numbers 25 tells us that 24,000 died, while Paul tells us in verse 8 that 23,000 died. Isn't that a contradiction? No.
  - a) First, we should note that Paul does not tell us that only 23,000 died. If 24,000 perished, then it must be the case that 23,000 perished.
  - b) Second, any reasonable person will understand that most of the large numerical figures of mass casualties in the Old Testament are estimates, just as they are today. When we read in the newspaper that 7,000 have been killed by an Indonesian earthquake, most of us understand that number to be an estimate and we won't complain to the editor when the





themselves happened by way of example for us.

1. "This assertion implies that what is recorded in the Scriptures has meaning beyond the events themselves. The past was recorded with a view to the future."
  2. Paul also confirms for us here that the God of the Old Testament is also the God of the New Testament. God did not suddenly become lax in punishing transgression. In fact, if anything, the opposite is true -- not because God has changed, but because so much more has now been revealed and so much more responsibility has been placed on man to know and obey the will of God.
  3. The Corinthians had blithely ignored the warning siren blaring from the Biblical accounts of Israel's chronic idolatry and repeated punishments. If the wilderness generation met such a terrible end by spurning a concealed Christ, how much more the Corinthians will be condemned if they spurn the revealed Christ!
  4. The earlier generations lived at the beginning, when God's promises were announced. Christians stand at a point where God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ and the veil has been lifted.
  5. That the ends of the ages have arrived means that they have reached their destination.
    - a) Galatians 4:4-5 tells us that God sent forth his Son when the fulness of the time was come.
    - b) The plural "ends" of the ages may refer to the ends of two strands of time - not a temporal end, but an end as the end of a string, which has two ends. In that sense, the temporal end of the old dispensation met the temporal beginning of the new dispensation -- but each is an end in the sense that each dispensation had an end at either side.
    - c) Another possibility is that the ends refer to the temporal end of God's dealings with the Jews as his chosen people and God's dealings with the Gentile world before Christ. Those two ends met and were combined in the new dispensation.
- K.** (Verse 12) "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."
1. The Corinthian know-it-alls not only needed to watch lest they caused others to fall, but they also needed to watch lest they fell themselves.
  2. Their presumed knowledge had led them to risk idolatrous associations and think nothing of it. They were oblivious to the fact that it placed them in dire

spiritual jeopardy.

- a) Are we ever guilty of that? I can watch any kind of filthy movie; it doesn't have any effect on me! I can drink a few beers; that won't cause me to become a drunk! It's just innocent flirting; nothing will ever come of it!
  3. Paul sounds the alarm against the pagan banquets that must have seemed to the Corinthians to be merely innocent social gatherings with a trivial amount of meaningless ritual.
  4. If Paul thought that he could fall (as he said in 9:27), how much more then could the Corinthians fall? No one is immune from falling, and those who think they are may be in the greatest danger of all.
- L. (Verse 13) Verse 13 has been called undoubtedly one of the most difficult verses in the entire epistle.
1. The usual interpretation has the passage refer to our internal temptations to sin, from which God will always provide an escape. Rather than belabor that familiar interpretation, let's consider for a moment another possible, broader meaning.
  2. Paul may have in mind here external testing. The verb "to bear up under" appears two other times in the New Testament in the context of persecution (2 Timothy 3:11 and 1 Peter 2:19). The testing may involve not just the allurements of idolatry (the internal temptation) but also the persecution that its rejection entailed.
  3. Avoiding all overt associations with idolatry would invite hostility from the host who would see it as an insult both to himself and to his god. If the host was a patron or employer, then there could be financial retribution. Those who refused to offer a pinch of incense to Caesar were cast out of the trade guilds and were unable to find employment.
    - a) And how easy it would have been to rationalize it all away! God doesn't expect me to lose my job, does he. How could I give any money to the church? How can I spread the gospel if I avoid all of those pagan rituals? The gospel is one thing, but this business!
  4. The Corinthians no doubt thought they would be traumatized beyond repair if they refused to participate in those idol feasts. Paul's message is that their refusal will not result in any external testing that God's power cannot help them endure.
    - a) As surely as God tests, he provides a way out. But that exit is not an escape hatch that allows them to avoid all of the difficulties. If that were true, then it would be unnecessary for God to provide them the means "to

bear up under it."

- b) Their trials may be severe, but they are common to man. The Corinthians' experience was not unique, and in fact history tells us that Christians elsewhere suffered much worse trials.
5. God is faithful, but those who compromise with the world can expect not divine aid but divine destruction.
- a) God is just as faithful to destroy the wicked as He is faithful to save the righteous.

### III. Verses 14-22: Warnings Against Idolatry

A. **1 Corinthians 10:14-22** <sup>14</sup> Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup> I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. <sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. <sup>18</sup> Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? <sup>19</sup> What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? <sup>20</sup> But I *say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. <sup>21</sup> Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. <sup>22</sup> Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

#### B. (Verse 14) Flee idolatry!

1. Paul opens this section of his argument against idol food with a direct command that is the climactic conclusion to his previous arguments on the subject -- flee idolatry!
2. The address "my dearly beloved" denotes his genuine affection for the Corinthians, and he stresses that bond before he reloads and fires a direct shot at their compromise with idolatry. His love and concern for them has not dimmed in the slightest despite their attacks against him and despite the vigor with which he has had to argue with them.
3. Verse 14 gives the fundamental mandate from all of the arguments going all the way back to 8:1. It matches the prohibition "flee fornication" in 6:18, which followed Paul's theological discussion of sexual sins in 5:1-6:17. The parallels in his arguments are striking:
  - a) Flee idolatry (10:14) and flee fornication (6:18).
  - b) The Lord's Supper represents that we are one body with Christ (10:16-17)

and your bodies are members of Christ (6:15-17).

- c) All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful (10:23 and 6:12).
  - d) Do all to the glory of God (10:31) and glorify God in your body (6:20).
  - e) As a union with a prostitute is unthinkable for a Christian, so becoming a partner at the table with demons is equally unthinkable.
4. Some commentators and translations try to downplay the meaning of "Flee!" The RSV, for example, translates it as "Shun idols." But Paul is urging more than just caution; he is urging active fleeing!
- a) "Idolatry is like radioactive waste: it requires them to bolt from this area immediately to avoid contamination and certain death."
5. Chapter 8 must be interpreted in light of verse 14.
- a) If we conclude that Paul permitted some to eat in idol temples in Chapter 8, then how do we reconcile this command in verse 14? The short answer is that we don't. If Paul allowed some to flirt with idolatry in Chapter 8, then he must have changed his mind two chapters later. But (as we saw in Lesson 12), Paul did NOT allow anyone to flirt with idolatry in Chapter 8 or anywhere else. His view on the subject was uncompromising and he commanded that we have the same view. We all must flee idolatry.
- C. (Verse 15) Some see irony in verse 15, but I think a better view is that Paul truly believes that the Corinthians are wise enough to see the illogic of their behavior and to discern the truth, and so he continues to present a reasoned argument. In the next seven verses, he will ask seven rhetorical questions, each inviting their thoughtful response.
- D. (Verses 16-17) Paul next appeals to the Lord's Supper to show that the idol meals are similar but opposite.
- 1. They are similar in that each builds a bond between the participants and the honored deity, but they are opposite in that one honors Christ, the true God, while the other honors false idols and demons.
  - 2. The order of the cup and then the bread in these verses is interesting. It reverses the more traditional ordering found, for example, in 11:23-26. Most likely Paul wanted the bread to be listed second so that it could lead easily to his next point in verse 17 -- that we being many are one bread, and one body.
  - 3. Paul makes three points about the Lord's Supper that apply directly to idol meals.

- a) First, partaking of the cup and the bread creates fellowship with Christ. No one can partake of the Lord's Supper as a neutral observer; and similarly no one can partake of an idol meal as a neutral observer. To partake of the meal is to fellowship with the honored deity. Fellowship with Christ excludes all other fellowships.
  - b) Second, partaking of the Lord's Supper creates fellowship with the fellow partakers. The cup is something we give thanks for, and the bread is something we break. Because there is one bread, we are one body. If you partake of an idol meal in an idol temple, then you will be identified with your fellow partakers.
  - c) Third, the emphasis on the blood of Christ stresses the seriousness of the covenantal relationship to Christ. Blood seals the covenant, and it is that covenant that we break when we commune with demons.
4. The Lord's supper requires absolute faithfulness to Christ and to Christ alone. Believers cannot participate in the Lord's supper and a feast to an idol as if they were just parts of a progressive dinner. The two meals are mutually exclusive.
- E. (Verse 18) "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?"
1. The issue here is which altar Paul has in mind. Is he speaking of the altar in the Jewish temple, or is he still speaking of Israel during the exodus, in which case the altar would most likely be the altar that Aaron built in front of the golden calf.
    - a) Exodus 32:5-6 And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. 6 And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.
  2. I think the context favors the second option. The phrase "Israel after the flesh" also suggests that he has an idolatrous altar in mind here. Romans 8:5 uses the same phrase to describe those who live according to the flesh.
  3. Paul's point here is that eating any food that has been consecrated on an altar binds the diner to the altar.
- F. (Verses 19-22) Unlike his questions in verses 16 and 18, Paul's rhetorical question in verses 19 expects a negative response.
1. Paul is anticipating an objection -- how can a bond be established with an idol

when the idol is nothing and the false god that it represents does not exist?

2. Paul's response is that while the idol may be nothing, the value system it represents is very, very real. Idols are more than simply foolish human inventions. They represent something demonic so that any sacrifice to an idol is really a sacrifice to a demon. The idols are nothing, but the demons are very real.
  - a) It has been said that the Devil's greatest wile is to persuade men that he does not exist. But he does exist, and he has many helpers. It is hard to believe that anyone could read the newspaper or watch the 10:00 news and not believe that Satan is both real and very active.
3. Israel probably thought they were offering sacrifices to God in front of that golden calf. In fact, Aaron told them they were going to have "a feast to the Lord" the next day. Paul tells us here that their sacrifices that day were not to God, but were to demons, and the same was true of the idol sacrifices of his day.
4. And Paul does not want them to be partakers with demons. Some commentators talk here about the risk of this occurring if the Corinthians ate a meal in an idol's temple. They have missed Paul's point entirely. Paul is not telling them that this is a risk; he is telling them that this will happen when they eat that idol meal. They will become partners with demons. There is no such thing as a neutral observer at such a meal.
5. "However innocent the Christian's intentions might be, the result is that they give their assent to, collaborate with, and swell the ranks of demonic defiance of the sovereign God. They may think that they are simply joining a festive party, but in reality they are joining a party infested by Satan and forming an alliance with those who crucified the Son of God. They cannot dismiss these meals as simply a casual, meaningless social repast any more than they can dismiss a sexual relationship with a prostitute as a casual, meaningless tryst. If God's pattern revealed in Scripture holds true, they will provoke God to jealousy, who will turn away from them, and they will be destroyed as a perverse generation."
6. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" This is not an ironic question to the so-called strong in the church. Paul includes himself in these questions. He is not addressing these questions to a subset of the church; he is addressing it to all Christians, including himself.
7. The references to God's jealousy in the Old Testament generally have to do with idol worship. Paul takes for granted here that God's attitude toward idolatry has not changed in the new dispensation.

## IV. Verses 23-33: Meat Sold in the Marketplace

A. **1 Corinthians 10:23-33** All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. <sup>24</sup> Let no man seek his own, but every man another's *wealth*. <sup>25</sup> Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, *that* eat, asking no question for conscience sake: <sup>26</sup> For the earth *is* the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. <sup>27</sup> If any of them that believe not bid you *to a feast*, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. <sup>28</sup> But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth *is* the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: <sup>29</sup> Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another *man's* conscience? <sup>30</sup> For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? <sup>31</sup> Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. <sup>32</sup> Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: <sup>33</sup> Even as I please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking mine own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.

B. (Verses 23-24) Paul now returns to the issue of liberty that he raised back in 8:9. Some in the church assumed that their knowledge about idols gave them the liberty to eat in an idol's temple.

1. They supported their view, no doubt, with the maxim "all things are lawful," which we first saw in 6:12 and which we discussed at length in that lesson. Paul again reminds them that there are limits to their liberty, and those limits involve their effect on other people or on the church.
2. Another problem with their credo was recognized by Clement of Alexandria, who said: "Those who take advantage of everything that is lawful rapidly deteriorate into doing what is not lawful." And that seems to have happened here, where the Corinthians' freedom to buy meat in the marketplace (something lawful) led them to eat it in an idol's temple (something not lawful).
3. We know that the Christian community is to be known by its love for each other, but what does that love involve? To Paul it meant that he would do nothing that might cause a brother or sister in Christ to fall, even if it meant that he must never eat meat again. It meant he would not seek his good, but the good of others. That principle is at the foundation of all Christian conduct, and Paul is about to apply it to the issue of idol meat, not in the temple, but out in the marketplace.

C. (Verses 25-27) Avoiding all food that had any associations with an idol was a tall order because any food purchased in the market or served in a friend's home could easily have come from some idolatrous rite.

1. But that did not mean that all meat carried that taint. An excavation of a butcher shop in Pompeii revealed entire skeletons of sheep. Had those animals been slaughtered in a temple, priestly portions would have been

missing. Thus, the probability of buying idol meat may have been high, but it was not 100%.

2. Paul could have told the Corinthians that they must ask for non-idol meat and purchase only non-idol meat. But he did not. Why? As far as Paul is concerned (and hence as far as God is concerned), food outside the idol's orbit is permitted; it is free of any idolatrous contamination. There was no need to investigate its history. "God has not called us to be meat inspectors." Outside the context of the idol temple, idol meat is simply meat. It all belongs to God, and it can be eaten with thankfulness. The Corinthians knew all they needed to know about the source of that meat -- it came from God and could be eaten with thanksgiving.
  3. Commentators are split over whether the conscience in verse 25 is that of the purchasers or that of a presumably weaker observer. I think the better view is the former. In short, to ask questions about the source of meat in an open market would unnecessarily burden their own consciences. If God no longer cares where the meat came from, then neither should they. Buy it, thank God for it, and eat it. Or if you are served meat at a friend's home, again don't ask -- just be thankful and eat it.
  4. Some argue that verse 27 refers not to a private home but to an idol's temple, but does that make any sense? How could there be any question of where meat had come from when you are served it in an idol's temple? There would be no need to inquire as to its source in that situation. Paul must be speaking here about a situation where the source is not known, and his advice shows that he had no intention of cutting the Christians off entirely from their unbelieving friends and family members.
- D. (Verses 29-30) But there are limits to what the Christians could eat. What Paul finds sinful is eating idol food in any setting that might give others the slightest hint that Christians sanctioned idolatry. Eating the food in an idol temple always gave that impression. Eating food in private settings or buying food in a marketplace sometimes gave that impression.
1. If anyone declares that the meat has the slightest religious significance, then the Christians must abstain. By knowingly partaking of idol food, they would be tacitly condoning idolatry and lending support to the adversaries.
  2. Commentators are all over the map regarding the identity of the informant in verse 28. Is he a host who is sensitive to the Christians' position? Is he a host who is challenging the Christians to see if they will compromise? Is he a pagan guest? Is he a fellow possibly weaker Christian? Is he a Christian slave who helped prepare the meal? Ultimately it makes no difference; the result is the same. What matters is what the informant says.
  3. Paul instructs them not to eat because of the one who made the disclosure



and because of conscience. And he clarifies in verse 29 that he means the conscience of the one who made the announcement, not that of the believer who was served the meat.

- a) Most assume that the conscience here harkens back to the weak conscience in chapter 8, but that is not necessarily the case. It may refer here simply to the person's consciousness -- what he knows. The person making the announcement knows the source of the food, and he understands it to have some religious significance.
  - b) The general rule is that the food's history does not matter. But an exception occurs when the food's history matters to someone who considers it sacred. In that situation, it is not what the Christian knows that counts, but what others believe. If a Christian were to eat idol meat in that situation, it would have at least three harmful effects:
    - (1) It would compromise their confession of the one true God by tacitly recognizing the sanctity of false gods.
    - (2) It would confirm rather than challenge the pagan's idolatrous convictions.
    - (3) It would make the Christians appear hypocritical in their condemnation of idolatry.
  - c) The Christians should see the announcement as an opportunity to display their faith before pagans -- and we should pray every day that we are given such opportunities, and when those prayers are answered we should never let such an opportunity pass us by.
4. In the second half of verse 29, Paul asks "why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?," and in verse 30, he asks, "For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?"
- a) These two rhetorical questions have been called "the major stumbling block to determining the flow of the argument in this section."
  - b) Some see them as Paul defending himself regarding his own past actions in Corinth, but that would require us to believe that Paul himself had eaten idol meat that was publicly announced as such. If so, then Paul would have violated his own instructions in this chapter, something I do not believe we can accept.
  - c) A better view is that these questions follow from verse 27, with verse 28 being a parenthetical interruption.
    - (1) Paul allows the Christians to attend a dinner without asking questions on the ground of conscience. He then interrupts that thought with a parenthetical observation -- they are to abstain if someone announces the source of the

food because in that case conscience does count, the conscience of the other. Paul then returns to the original thought in verse 27 and explains why conscience does not matter when the source is not known.

- E. (Verses 31-33) The ultimate aim of a Christian is to please God, not themselves.
1. Verse 1 of chapter 11 should have been the last verse of chapter 10, but we will nevertheless leave that verse for next week.
  2. The word "all" in verse 31 excludes the possibility that a Christian can compartmentalize his life into a religious segment where he pleases God and a secular segment where he does what he pleases. It also sounds a striking counterpoint to the earlier maxim, "all things are permissible." Only those things that bring glory to God are permitted.
  3. Paul's concern here is much broader than simply some internal squabble in the church. The issue of idol food directly affected the church's ability to spread the gospel -- and that is always the case when the church begins to compromise with the world and forgets that it is in the business of pleasing and glorifying God.