

First Epistle to the Corinthians

19 – Essay Three: Freedom and Responsibility (3.5) – No Identification

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

1. Outlines

a. Kenneth E. Bailey¹

i. Freedom and Responsibility (8:1-11:1)

1. Food Offered to Idols: Freedom and Responsibility (8:1-13)
 - a. Christians must surrender personal rights for the sake of others
2. Paul’s Personal Freedom and Responsibility (9:1-18)
 - a. Paul defends his apostolic authority and rights
 - b. Paul refuses to exercise his apostolic rights (refuses support)
 - i. So that only Christ can have a claim on him
 - ii. To illustrate the free nature of the gospel
3. Freedom in Mission: Full Identification (9:19-27)
 - a. Enter into the lives of those you are with
 - b. Become weak, not “serve the weak”
 - c. Incarnational mission work demands great discipline
4. Old Covenant Sacraments and Idolatry: Partial Identification (10:1-13)
 - a. Sacraments aren’t magic
 - b. It’s about what the sacraments point to that matters
 - c. Don’t let sacraments lead you into idolatry
5. New Covenant Sacraments and Idolatry: No Identification (10:14-22)
6. Food Offered to Idols: Freedom and Responsibility – A Final Word (10:23-11:1)

2. Rhetoric

- a. Seven-part ring composition
- b. Topics: communion, sacrifice, sacraments
- c. Center: introduces topic of demons

Table 1: Bailey, location 3198

1 Corinthians 10:14-22 (ESV)		Rhetoric
1	14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from <u>idolatry</u> [or, <i>worship of idols</i>]. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.	Flee from The idols
2	16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation [or, <i>communion</i>] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation [or, <i>communion</i>] in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.	The Cup - Communion The blood of Christ The Bread - Communion The body of Christ
3	18 <u>Consider the people of Israel</u> : [or, <i>Look at Israel according to the flesh</i>] are not those who eat the sacrifices <u>participants in</u> [or, <i>in communion with</i>] the altar?	Communion With the altar

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 2632

4	<p>19 What do I imply then? That food <u>offered</u> [or, <i>sacrificed</i>] to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?</p> <p>20 No, I imply that what pagans [or, <i>Gentiles</i>] <u>sacrifice they</u> offer to demons <u>and not to God</u>. [or, <i>not to God do they sacrifice</i>]</p>	<p>Sacrifice To idols is Sacrifice to demons</p>
5	<p>I do not want you to be <u>participants</u> [or, <i>in communion</i>] with demons.</p>	<p>Communion with demons</p>
6	<p>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.</p>	<p>The Cup Of the Lord & demons? The Table Of the Lord & demons?</p>
7	<p>22 Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?</p>	<p>Do not anger The Lord!</p>

3. First Thoughts

- a. What do you think Paul is trying to communicate to the Corinthian believers?
- b. What do you think this passage has to do with us?

4. Ring 1 (1,7)

- a. "Therefore..." – we need to look at what Paul's just wrote (c.f., 1.a.i.4, above)
- b. v.13 – Paul wrote that the Corinthians need not succumb to the temptation of idolatry and that a way of escape will be made so that they could endure the temptation
- c. Here is the way: "Flee from idolatry"
 - i. Echoes "flee from prostitution" of 6:18 – both idolatry and sacred prostitution were found together in Corinth
 - ii. Placing one's self in opposing philosophical and metaphysical home environments is a bad move – is this what Paul is communicating?
 - iii. Because on the other hand, Christians ought to engage these people – mission
- d. A bit of sarcasm from Paul? "If you say you're so knowledgeable and wise, you ought to know that what I'm telling you is true"
- e. Paul alludes back to Hebrew history: persistence in idolatry never ends well
- f. Our problem: what is idolatry in our context?

5. Ring 2 (2, 6)

- a. Key idea: the sacraments are participation/communion in some kind of transcendent/mystical

With Jerome Murphy-O'Connor and G. G. Findlay I have translated the Greek word *koinonia* as "communion" rather than "partnership." The word *partnership* has an organizational and even a commercial flavor. *Communion* brings the language into the sphere of the holy.²

- b. Some in Corinth were using the Communion as a way to divide the church
- c. Paul writes that the Communion – its rituals and elements – are not spiritual "magic"
- d. Communion is about active participation in the community of believers
- e. Communion unites individuals into a single community
 - i. Christ is one; therefore, the church is one

² Bailey, location 3222.

- ii. Communion represents transformation into Christ's nature

"Communion in the *body of Christ*" unites us *both* to Christ and to the church that is his body. Paul wants to ensure that his readers catch this double meaning.³

- f. A person cannot have two natures; therefore, s/he cannot participate in opposing sacraments
 - g. Sacraments are not mere "country club" type traditions, but they are participation in the mystical-spiritual realm
 - i. Mystical: intangible, indirect evidence, relational, allows unpredictability
 - ii. Magical: tangible, direct evidence, ritualistic, predictable
 - h. Cup and table – an allusion to Psalm 23 and Paul applying its message to Corinth?
 - i. Cup – representing vertical communion with God; Table – representing horizontal communion with fellow believers
6. Center (3, 4, 5)
- a. First, another illustration from Hebrew history
 - i. "Israel according to the flesh" is the Greek phrasing and captures Paul's intent
 - ii. The opposing statement would be "Israel according to the promise"
 - iii. "According to flesh" is Paul's way of saying "without faith"
 - 1. Also, Paul includes Jews during his time who were offering sacrifices at Jerusalem, but were without faith
 - iv. In other words, Paul is not commending the Israelites in v.18 – they may have gone through God-commanded rituals, but their communion was with a physical object and not the person/spirit of God
 - b. Next the pagan sacrifices to idols
 - i. The Gentile believers might then argue that if Israelite sacrifices and participating in associated feasts didn't create a relationship with God, why can't they (the Gentiles) participate in pagan rituals and feasts?
 - ii. Paul agrees that idols aren't gods and the rituals and feasts in themselves don't create a relationship to pagan gods
 - iii. But within the spiritual realm, beings and forces against God do exist – what Paul terms as "demons"
 - iv. Paul here is not expounding on the nature of demons and demonic activity – he simply accepts their existence and threat

This comment is not a full-blown exposition on the demonic, nor is it possible to understand exactly what Paul believed a demon to be, although his thought here is in perfect line with OT passages that identify pagan gods as demons and condemn such sacrifices...

Paul's general perceptions and beliefs about the demonic are not clear from this statement, although there is no reason to conclude that he doubted the existence of demons. Nevertheless, scholarly discussions on this verse that enter into denial or defense of the reality of the demonic are off the point. Paul is juxtaposing two levels of concern, two loyalties, and two powers. One power is the power of God manifested in a clear and ultimate form in Jesus Christ, and the other is labeled demons. Paul states

³ Bailey, location 3226.

plainly that the Corinthian Christians are to be concerned with and involved with only God. There is no room for other affiliations, and the Corinthians are to avoid all possible compromises of their relationship to God.⁴

7. What does this mean for us?

- a. The crux is understanding “idolatry”
 - i. We don’t really identify with it – we give intellectual explanations and give contemporary examples, but we generally don’t emotionally relate to it
 - ii. So while we intellectually agree that passages like today’s are important, we tend to dismiss them at the subconscious as irrelevant to our lives
 - iii. The Corinthians, however, were surrounded by idolatry – it was a part of their everyday lives – so the key for us is to try to find something that will connect us emotionally to ancient idolatry and its pervasiveness
- b. Idolatry as magic – fantasy is a popular genre in today’s literature and entertainment
 - i. Magic seeks to harness and control powers beyond that normally allowed or given – power that belongs to the gods and not to humans, illegitimate power
 1. Gifts (physical or spiritual) *granted by God* are legitimate powers
 - ii. Magic seeks to tame the unpredictable and unknown
 - iii. Magic prescribes detailed rituals (e.g., sacrifices, potions, foods) and words (e.g., incantations, spells) that purportedly allow an individual access to illegitimate power
 - iv. Magic is generally motivated by some element of self-interest
- c. But in our daily lives most of us don’t deal with magic (or idolatry)... or do we?
 - i. Do we desire illegitimate power? What kinds? How do we seek them?
 - ii. Does modern Christianity ever employ magic? How?
 - iii. How might we now interpret “flee from idolatry”?
- d. In Mission
 - i. Default position: full identification in all aspects of life
 - ii. Caveat: Practices that touch upon the mystical which are reminders of the true God – you may participate for the right reasons – partial identification
 - iii. Exception: Practices that misrepresent God’s character, practices that elevate a thing or ritual over God, practices that invoke or appeals to divinity (of any kind) as a means of control over another – do not participate – no identification

The issue has been singular. They were arguing for the right to attend pagan feasts and were trying to "build up" others by having them attend as well. Paul says No. Not only is the latter action totally unloving—and Christian behavior is based on love, not knowledge—but the action itself is totally incompatible with life in Christ as it is celebrated at the Lord's Table.⁵

⁴ *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, entry for 1 Cor. 10:20.

⁵ *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*, entry for 1 Cor. 10:22.