

First Epistle to the Corinthians

20 – Essay Three: Freedom and Responsibility (3.6) – Food Offered to Idols, Revisited

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

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)
 - a. Idols aren't real, but forces opposed to the kingdom of God are real
 - b. Christians cannot belong to both kingdoms, thus they cannot participate in activities that are antithetical to God's kingdom
 - i. To participate in such activities is to join with "demons"
 - ii. (Important: Paul is speaking primarily to the collective church, not individuals – so this would be about a group's actions rather than strictly an individual's)
 - c. The only course of action that Christians have when faced with problematic "sacraments" is to flee
6. Food Offered to Idols: Freedom and Responsibility – A Final Word (10:23-11:1)

2. Rhetoric

- a. Seven-part ring composition plus final note
- b. In private homes, yours or others, don't worry about food rules
- c. But be considerate of an unbeliever whose scruples might be offended
- d. Don't let your actions hinder mission

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

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 (ESV)		Rhetoric
1	10:23 “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. 24 Let no one seek his own <u>good</u> , [<i>advantage</i>] but <u>the good</u> [<i>that</i>] of <u>his neighbor</u> . [<i>the other</i>]	Summary Principle Seek what helps and builds Seek the advantage of the other
2	25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For “the earth is the Lord’s, and <u>the fullness thereof</u> .” [<i>everything in it</i>]	Eat All is the Lord's
3	27 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.	Eat All offered to you
4	28 But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” [<i>hierothyton</i>] then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience — 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his.	Do not eat
5	For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s <u>conscience</u> ? [<i>scruples</i>] 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?	Eat and give thanks
6	31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.	Eat In all - glorify God
7	32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 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	Application of principle Offense does not build up I try to please all Not your advantage, But others' - for salvation
8	11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.	A personal appeal

3. First thoughts

- a. What does this passage seem to be saying to you?
- b. How does it fit into the rest of the essay?
- c. How important is it that this is seen in context of the entirety of 8:1-11:1?

4. Details (1,7)

- a. Emphasis (found in both sections): Don’t seek your own advantage; seek the good/salvation of the other
- b. Not my rights, but what will build up the community
- c. “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25-28); Leviticus 19:17-18, 33-34 – who is my *neighbor*?²
 - i. Brother or stranger among us?

² Bailey, locations 3328-3339.

- ii. Jesus offers a third option: the *other* who is not among you
- d. Paul uses the same word in 10:24 as in the parable of the Good Samaritan

Paul is best understood to be urging his readers to reach out to the one who is different.³

- e. How precisely does Paul intend his readers to apply “not all things are helpful..., not all things build up” and “seek the good of the other”?
 - i. Don’t offend anyone – but this doesn’t mean “don’t critique”

The standard is: Give no offense to Jews, Greeks or to the church. For [Paul] there will be no public attacks on the faith of others. Critical analysis, yes, attacks—no...!

[Paul critiqued idolatry in Corinth.] But there is no attack on any of these idols, their sacred books, their temples or their priests. When lecturing on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-31) Paul found common ground between his message and respected Greek authors. In Paul’s ministry, tolerance, open-mindedness and respect *flowed together with* critical analysis and nonapologetic evangelism.⁴

1. Critique the data; don’t attack people or their beliefs
2. This doesn’t mean the receiving party of the critique will never be offended
3. Paul’s words thus should be understood as: strive to minimize causing offense

- ii. When you don’t offend, you have a better opportunity to gain a hearing of the gospel message

Paul's point of course is related to behavior that is intentional. That is, with regard to "eating, drinking, etc." one is not purposely to pursue a path that is to the detriment of another. To "give offense," therefore, does not so much mean to "hurt someone's feelings" as to behave in such a way as to prevent someone else from hearing the gospel, or to alienate someone who is already a brother or sister.⁵

- iii. “Helpful” can mean 1) bringing together, 2) bearing a burden together, 3) bear suffering with, 4) be in harmony with, and 5) coming together in marriage⁶

5. Details (2,6)

- a. In your own private homes don’t worry about purchasing meat at the market

In brief, Paul is saying, "Eat without thinking about the scruples you have been taught by tradition." In other words, the Christian does enjoy a freedom from mere social conventions and mere religious regulations. Freedom is found in relationship to God, and action is to be determined in the context of divine-human relations. To put Paul's point of view into paraphrase, "If you aren't worried about offending God, don't worry about other things."⁷

- b. Everything belongs to God (Psalm 24:1 LXX)

³ Bailey, location 3345.

⁴ Bailey, location 3360.

⁵ *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*, entry for 1 Cor. 10:31-32.

⁶ Bailey, location 3355.

⁷ *Understanding the Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, entry for 1 Cor. 10:25.

- i. The Jewish rabbis used this Psalm to defend the contention that a blessing must be said over every meal⁸

But what Paul here does is full of irony toward his Jewish heritage, whether intended or not. The rabbis saw the text as the reason for thanking God for their food; but the food they thus blessed had been thoroughly "investigated" before the prayer. Paul now uses the text to justify eating all foods, even those forbidden by Jews, since God is the ultimate source of the food—even that sold in the *macellum*. For that reason it can be taken with thanksgiving. The clear implication is that nothing contaminates food as such along the way. Apart from his radical statements on circumcision, it is hard to imagine anything more un-Jewish in the apostle than this.⁹

- c. The question a Christian ought to ask about every action is: How does this communicate the character of God to the world?

6. Details (3,5)

- a. What about when a Christian is invited to dinner at an unbeliever's home?
- b. Again, don't worry about the food and its origins
 - i. Paul writes that he himself partakes of marketplace meat
 - ii. Thankfulness (to God, as well as to the pagan host?) builds up

The reader sees that Paul addresses the entire congregation, as is evident in the plural "you" forms that he employs throughout this discussion. Initially, in this verse, he tells the Corinthians that in a typical, uncomplicated situation, they are to eat—even at the home of those who are not believers—without worrying about the source of the foods that are served. Apparently Christian freedom meant that Christians did not have to go out of their way to comply with particular socioreligious conventions.¹⁰

7. Details (4 – center)

- a. When someone points out that meat served was offered to idols, Christians have a responsibility to take heed
- b. But who, precisely, is this "someone"?¹¹
 - i. First, it takes place at a banquet hosted by an unbeliever
 - ii. Is it the host, a pagan fellow guest, or a fellow believing guest?
 - iii. The language used (sacrificial meat [pagan terminology] vs. idol meat [Jewish-Christian terminology]) suggests unbeliever rather than believer
 - iv. The use of "someone" rather than "he" suggests a fellow guest rather than the host
- c. The pagan guest is trying to "help out" the Christian guest by pointing out the source of the food
 - i. The responsible Christian, out of love, ought to heed the pagan guest's concern

The clue lies in the meaning of "conscience," which is not to be understood as "a moral arbiter" but as "moral consciousness." The one who has pointed out the sacrificial origins of this meat to a Christian has done so out of a sense of moral obligation to the Christian, believing that Christians, like Jews, would not eat such food. So as not to offend that person, nor his/her moral expectations of Christians, and

⁸ NICNT, entry for 1 Cor. 10:25.

⁹ NICNT, entry for 1 Cor. 10:26.

¹⁰ UBC, entry for 1 Cor. 10:27.

¹¹ NICNT, entry for 1 Cor. 10:28b-29a discusses the following subpoints

precisely because it is *not* a matter of Christian moral consciousness, one should forbear under these circumstances.

If this is the correct understanding of the text, then what Paul is not referring to is a fellow believer's conscience as restricting the actions of another, as is so often assumed [my emphasis]. The significance of this observation is that Paul does not allow *any* Christian to make food a matter of *Christian* concern; he does not even do that in Rom. 14, where he does allow people their differences in such matters.¹²

8. Detail (8)

- a. In those places where Paul's actions reflect Christ's, the Corinthians are to imitate

9. Summary

- a. Just as knowledge must be tempered with love (8:1-13), freedom must also be tempered with love
- b. Paul continues to prepare and foreshadow chapter 13

The larger question is not, what does freedom assure me...? But rather, what does love require of me...?¹³

10. Essay Three

- a. Consumption of sacrificial meat should not concern Christians, wherever it occurs, except...
 - i. Eating as a part of idol worship is prohibited
 - ii. And when an unbeliever points out the sacrificial meat to you
- b. Don't make eating and drinking a "test of Christian fellowship"
- c. In all things, keep mission to "the other" your foremost concern – as far as it is in your power, do nothing to offend them and do everything allowable to integrate with them, so that your actions and words will be seen as God's glory and gospel

Despite this passage, the issue of personal freedom in matters that are *adiaphora* [nonessentials], and the limitation of freedom for the sake of others, continue to haunt the church. Usually the battle rages over what constitutes *adiaphora*. Conservatives on these issues simply fail to reckon with how "liberal" Paul's own view really is. Hence Paul is seldom heard for the sake of traditional regulations. On the other hand, the assertion of freedom to the hurt of others is not the biblical view either. However, in most contemporary settings the "offended" are not unbelievers or new Christians, but those who tend to confuse their own regulations with the eternal will of God.¹⁴

¹² *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 10:28b-29a.

¹³ Bailey, location 3400.

¹⁴ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:1.