

WHERE WE ARE HEADED

This week we wrap up Paul's extended discussion of "food sacrificed to idols" which he began in chapter eight. The question was raised by the Corinthians, and the answer takes Paul into issues of discernment, God's glory, and living for what matters most.

As he draws his thoughts to a close, he addresses a couple of specific examples of how a right understanding of freedom will play out for the Corinthians. And we will try and build on his examples to explore what it means for us to live in our freedom for the glory of God.

WALKING THROUGH THE DISCUSSION

Many people groups in our world are struggling to find freedom. There are pockets throughout the world where fighting has broken out for the sake of freedom. Although we don't "fight" for freedom the same way in our lives in Christ, the longing for freedom and the experience of freedom will launch our discussion. That is the focus of the opening questions.

Bottom line? What is it that people want in wanting freedom? It is not simply "I want to do what I want to do," but it is really more "There is a *kind of life* that I long to experience." That is what we hope your people see in discussing the opening questions.

As you walk through the passage, you will see that: 1) Paul is finishing up his discussion of the topic of food offered to idols; and 2) that he addresses a few specific situations. He has explained (all the way back in chapter eight) that food sacrificed to idols, in and of itself, doesn't really impact the believer's life—one is neither more nor less "spiritual" if one eats. But there is yet more to say about this topic.

In 10:14-22, he addresses the issue of food offered to idols in the specific situation of *participation in idol worship services*. Eating the food sacrificed to pagan gods was part of the worship service. Paul addresses that practice (and Christians' response to that) in this section.

He begins by calling their attention to the "participation" in ("fellowship" in) Christ's life and His body in 10:16-17. When he writes about a believer's "participation in the blood of Christ" he is not taking a "sacramental" view of the Lord's supper—as if in some way the bread and cup become something they are not and that we actually drink Jesus' blood. When he speaks of participating in Christ's blood, he is referring to our fellowship in the benefits, our experience of what Jesus has done for us through His death. In referring to our participation in the body of Christ, he appears to be affirming that our celebration of communion is, in fact, a participation in the common life that all those who believe share together with Jesus. We are, in a profound and grace-based way, united with Jesus into one community together.

Paul then turns to the sacrifices of Israel in verse 18, noting that the Jews, in offering sacrifices and sharing in the food offered were sharing in fellowship in what was going on. (Notice, they don't "eat" the altar, but share in it's benefits and blessings; this parallels how believers

enjoy the benefits of what Jesus did for us.)

Thus, when Paul turns back to the topic of the food offered to idols (in verses 19-21), he points out that although the food itself is not "demonized" by being offered to idols (who are, in fact, in reality demonic spirits), those who participate in those rituals wherein food is offered to idols are "fellowshipping" (that is, sharing in life with) demons. And that, Paul insists, should not be. It would be one thing to eat (or not eat) food that was offered to idols (as discussed in chapter eight), but to participate in the meal as a participant in the sacrificial offering is unthinkable to Paul. One's freedom to eat does not confer freedom to participate in idolatry.

Then, Paul addresses the *purchasing of food in the market*. He writes that a believer can buy and eat what is in the market, without troubling one's conscience about it (10:25-26). Do not be concerned about whether the meat came from a temple or not; ultimately the food came from God.

Then he turns his attention to *being invited to a non-believer's house for a meal*. He writes that if one decides to go, it is fine to eat what is served (10:27). There is no need to be introspective about questions of where the food came from or not; be a gracious guest.

However, Paul does offer clarification. If eating in a non-believer's home and you are specifically told that the meat you are being served has been "offered for sacrifice," than it would be best to decline (10:28-29). Paul doesn't say you are to decline because it will necessarily adversely affect *you* spiritually—he says to not eat so as to not adversely impact the conscience of the non-believer. If the non-believer went out of his way to inform you that the meat was "idol food," the assumption would be that he did so because he was under the impression that, as such, it would matter to you. So, as not to unduly "mess up" his thinking about such matters, Paul says it would be best to refrain from eating.

Where is all this headed? A new set of "eating rules"? Of course not. Paul's thoughts are anchored in living out one's freedom for the "maximum spiritual benefit." Recall the image of "running the race" in 10:24-25. Certain "rights" are not fully exercised by an athlete for the sake of obtaining what matters to him or her more. That is the idea that undergirds Paul's discussion of freedoms.

There are times when we willingly curtail the exercise of freedoms that we rightly have because there is something we want more than that particular exercise of freedom!

Paul doesn't exercise his "right" to make his living from his preaching so that he can experience greater freedom in his preaching. Paul wouldn't exercise his freedom to eat meat if in so doing it hindered his pursuit of preaching the good news about Jesus.

Paul wants, above all, to fully live out the experience of intimacy with Jesus. Paul longs to spend his life as a herald of the great good news of what God has done in Jesus. And Paul is inviting the Corinthians (and us) to live out our freedoms in such ways that we enhance our experience of intimacy with Jesus and fellowship with one another. That is not rule-based living . . . it is living out our freedoms with an eye on maximizing the benefits of all that we have in Christ Jesus!

We will be looking at 1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

INITIAL THOUGHTS

Currently, in our world, many people groups are rallying and fighting for “freedom.” What do you think it is that they want?

When you think about your own life “in freedom,” how do you understand that? What does it mean to “live free”?

REFLECTING ON THE TEXT

In this section, Paul is finishing up his discussion of food offered to idols. He addresses a couple of specific situations that might arise around this particular issue.

What is the focus of his remarks in 10:16-22?

In 10:23 and 24, he offers something of a summary statement that guides his thinking. What is the basic idea?

In verses 25 through 30, he addresses three more possible “food offered to idols” situations. What are the three? What specific advice does have for each situation?

Often, verse 31 is read and applied with little regard for the context (here in this chapter). Thinking about what Paul has been saying about food offered to idols, what do you think his point is in what he says in 10:31?

BUILDING BRIDGES INTO LIFE

Take a step back from the specific issue that is in view. Try and think about what is shaping Paul’s thinking in addressing this issue of food sacrificed to idols. What do you think Paul wants us to understand about . . .

How we exercise the true freedom we have in Jesus?

How living in freedom could enhance our intimacy with Jesus?

How living in freedom could enhance our fellowship with one another?

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