

## | 1 Corinthians |

### Week 17 Scripture Guide | 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1<sup>1</sup>

#### Biblical Context

Paul has been addressing the issue of food sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλόθυτος, *eidōlothytos*) within the framework of knowledge and love (1 Cor 8:1-2). Ultimately, Paul had concluded that even though the believer “knows” that idols are nothing and that food offered to them is nothing, the believer should be willing to set aside his preference out of love and for the sake of another. We are called to have fellowship (*koinonia*) with one another. To forsake loving another believer by pursuing our own preferences, one sins against his brother and ultimately sins against Christ (8:12). Rather, Paul, as an example, shows how he has been willing to set aside his preferences, his rights, for the sake of the gospel (8:13-9:27). Not only was there a danger of the appearance of serving both God and idols, and thus causing a weaker brother to stumble, but there was also the very real danger that one would be ensnared in idolatry. Thus, Paul delivered the clear injunction to *flee* from the snare of idolatry and not put God to the test (10:14-22). While Paul would say the Christian should completely avoid eating idol’s food in the idol’s temple for multiple reasons, the Christian might find himself in a different scenario. After idol worshippers (pagans) would offer portions of an animal or other food to an idol, they would remove the rest for consumption in the god’s temple, or for sale in the market, and later in the home (cf. 10:23-31). Most meat in the market would have been previously offered to idols.<sup>2</sup> Paul again uses Corinthian maxims to correct their thinking, “All things are lawful/permissible (ἐξέστιν, *exestin*)” (10:23; cf. 6:12). Using the phrase twice, he quips two responses, “...but not all things are helpful (συμφέρει, *sumpherei*)...but not all things build up (οἰκοδομέω, *oikodomeō*, cf. 8:1; 10; 14:4, 17).” Paul had earlier contrasted knowledge (which “puffs up”) and love (which “builds” up, *oikodomeō*; 8:1). The problem was that by their lack of love, some weaker Corinthian believers were being encouraged (*oikodomeō*) to eat food sacrificed to idols (8:10). Paul delivers the injunction, “Let no one seek his own good, but the good of another (ἕτερος, *heteros*, “another,” ESV, “neighbor”; 10:24). Self-seeking is not consistent with the walk of the believer. The believer’s walk should be characterized by not being primarily concerned with his/her own interests, but the interests and the good of others, (cf. Rom 15:2; Phil 2:3). Paul forbade the Christian’s participation with food in the temple (10:14), but recognized that food was also sold in the marketplace and served in homes. Therefore, the Christian’s policy for eating meat sold in the market is, “don’t ask” (10:25) concerning its origins. After all, “the earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof” (Psa 24:1; Deut 10:14; 1 Cor 10:26). As an overreaction to Paul’s inexplicit policy, some Christians were requiring abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving (cf. Rom 14:2; 1 Tim 4:1).<sup>3</sup> For Paul, one of the ultimate goals in 1 Corinthians is that the church is built up. Recognizing that the world is full of unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor 5:10), he presents the situation of, an unbeliever (non-Christian, pagan, idol worshipper) inviting the believer to dinner (10:27a). In this scenario, Paul does not have just a single Christian being invited but uses the plural “you” (ὁἱ ὑμεῖς, *hymas*) implying that other believers are possibly present. It was likely that the meal would have been “prepared and arranged in accordance with the cultural and socioreligious conventions of the day. The meat almost certainly *will* be what had been offered in a temple, especially since the host serves good quality fare.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, Paul instructs, “eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience” (10:27b; cf. 10:25). But, if someone (the host, another believer, etc.) says, “This has been offered in sacrifice,”<sup>5</sup> Paul instructs the believer to put the conscience of that person above his own liberty and to abstain from eating (10:28). For Paul, the posture of the mature believer should be to sacrifice his/her own liberties for the

<sup>1</sup> The section concerning sacrificing our preferences for the good of others (1 Cor 8-10) can be read in conjunction with Romans 14.

<sup>2</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 373.

<sup>3</sup> Paul does not have an issue with the one who abstains (cf. Rom 14:2-4, 20-23) but just with the one that requires it of others.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 786.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Fee points out that the word used in this “hypothetical” situation is ἱερόθυτον (*hierothyton*) which would be a word use by pagans (idol worshippers) do designate “sacrificial meat,” as opposed to εἰδωλόθυτον (*eidōlothyton*) which is the Judeo-Christian term designating “idol meat,” used in a pejorative sense indicating that the unbelieving pagan is the one informing the believer. Another possibility is that a weaker believer (former idol worshipper) would be using old terminology. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 534.

sake of another, lest by the mature believer's knowledge and liberty, another is caused to stumble (cf 8:11). To neglect this perspective is to sin against another individual and ultimately sin against Christ (8:12).<sup>6</sup>

The individual would have most likely been motivated by their conscience to make the comment about the sacrificial food and therefore their conscience should be a concern of the mature believer. Further, it is suggested that the individual informing the believer about the "sacrificial meat" mentioned the "idolatrous association of the food because they are aware that Jews and Christians (the latter being considered a Jewish offshoot) had severe qualms about eating such food."<sup>7</sup> Thus some conclude that the Christian's refusal of partaking of the sacrificial food serves as an opportunity for believers to explain the Christian position. Having been informed, should the Christian partake of the idol's food, this could serve as a negative view of the faith as the Christian would not be living consistently with their claimed convictions, or else give the impression that Christians have no issue with food offered to idols or idolatry and thus misrepresent the faith.<sup>8</sup> While the mature believer is the one that must recognize the situation and act accordingly, Paul is very clear in saying that the Christian's concern is not his own conscience in this matter but the conscience of another. He will elsewhere clarify that both the mature believer and the one who is weaker in the faith should both "be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5) and be equally concerned with the other (14:3). Paul appears to go against his own argumentation in 1 Cor 10:29b. On the one hand, he has just made the point that the mature believer should abstain from eating food sacrificed to idols for the sake of another's conscience. He now asks, "For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced (βλασφημέω, *blasphemeō*) because of that for which I give thanks?" (10:29b-30). Truly, a Christian can in good conscience "eat whatever is set before you without raising question" concerning sacrificial food (10:26), and it should be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:4).<sup>9</sup> Paul, here, appears to be addressing "an objection of 'the strong'" as a sort of deliberative rhetoric.<sup>10</sup> The person abstaining for the sake of another is not sacrificing their freedom, but in their freedom choosing to live in a way as to not be a stumbling block for another (1 Cor 8:9; Rom 14:20). The sum of chapters 8-10 is, "that *while believers are 'free,' concern for the well-being of the other* has priority over everything else."<sup>11</sup> The believer is not compromising his/her freedom by considering another's sensibilities. "Quite the reverse: you are *using your freedom* to help the other and to serve the gospel."<sup>12</sup> In Rom 14:17, Paul reminds the church that "...the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Therefore, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). God is glorified when we sacrifice for others, for whom Christ died (8:11; Rom 14:15). Paul advocates for the freedom of the believer (1 Cor 10:25, 27), but also for the conscience of the weaker believer (8:7-13; 10:32b). He calls the church to "be imitators (μιμητής, *mimētes*) of me, as I am [an imitator] of Christ" (11:1). Walking in freedom in Christ, love for his neighbor, and glory to God, Paul was "to the Jew as a Jew, to the Greek as a Greek, and to the church of God as loving a fellow believer" that the gospel be preached and Jesus be proclaimed (9:19-23; 10:33).<sup>13</sup> His aim and his charge is that the believer's conduct be such that he does not stand in the way of their salvation.<sup>14</sup>

## Connection and Application

When it comes to decision-making and all of the circumstances to factor in, the Christian ethic, Paul says, is summed up in the question, "Does this glorify God?" For the Christian, rather than exploiting our freedom in Christ to do whatever we desire, the driving desire in our decision-making should be the way our decisions display the beauty, value, and worth of who God is both in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul has "another" in view, which could be a weaker believer (1 Cor 8) or another person who is not a believer, but could become one (10:32). However, because the "conscience" is a concern, it is more likely that a newer or weaker believer is in view.

<sup>7</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 492.

<sup>8</sup> Ciampa, 492.

<sup>9</sup> While the believer should receive with appreciation from the giver, the thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) is directed to God. Because all belongs to God

<sup>10</sup> Thiselton, 791.

<sup>11</sup> Thiselton, 791.

<sup>12</sup> Thiselton, 792.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, 539.

<sup>14</sup> Fee, 540.