BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON ELEVEN

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13

Thomas Schreiner, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, explains how Paul uses Israel as an example for the Corinthians:

1. Paul wants the Corinthians to know the lines of continuity between the experiences of Israel and those of the church. Significantly, he designates Israel *our ancestors*, even though most of the Corinthians were Gentiles, indicating that believers in Jesus Christ are part of restored Israel. Israel's story, Israel's history, is their history. The people of Israel were *under the cloud* during the exodus and the time in the wilderness. The reference here is to the pillar of cloud which guided Israel during the day and provided light at night (Exod. 13:21). The people's experience 'under the cloud' indicates that Israel was protected by God. As Psalm 105:39 says, 'He spread out a cloud as a covering', and the covering here designates protection. Also, Israel was rescued and delivered when the people *passed through the sea* (cf. Exod. 14:21). The protection and deliverance of Israel via the cloud and through the sea are captured well by Wisdom of Solomon 19:7–8:

> The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp,
> and dry land emerging where water had stood before,
> an unhindered way out of the Red Sea,
> and a grassy plain out of the raging waves,
> where those protected by your hand passed through
> as one nation,
> after gazing on marvellous wonders.
> (NRSV)

The church has been redeemed by Christ and lives under God's protection, but Israel had similar experiences, and, as Paul notes in verse 5, it failed to enter the land.

2. The inclination to draw parallels between the experience of Israel and that of the church is evident again here. Paul says that the wilderness generation was *baptised into Moses*, just as Christians are 'baptised into Christ Jesus' (Rom. 6:3). Moses' unique role as the leader of Israel was ratified when Israel was *in the cloud and in the sea*. The language of baptism seems a bit strange since Israel did not get wet but stayed dry as it passed through the water. We recognize that Paul argues analogously. In Christian baptism, believers are 'clothed … with Christ' (Gal. 3:27) and are incorporated into the church (1 Cor. 12:13). There is a sense in which Israel, through the great redemptive event of the exodus, was incorporated into Moses and established as the people of God. Some interpreters argue that the Corinthians had a magical and sacramental view of baptism and the Lord's Supper (vv. 3–4), imagining that the sacraments protected them from any possibility of judgment. This interpretation over-reads the connection drawn here, for we lack firm evidence for such a sacramental conviction. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are introduced here because they relate to the issue of eating food offered to idols. Paul responds to the notion that those who are delivered by God's grace and enjoy his mercy (baptism and the Lord's Supper) are necessarily spared judgment. The people of Israel had these blessings typologically, but they failed to enter the land of promise.

3. If the people of Israel enjoyed a sort of baptism, they also had experiences that anticipated the Lord's Supper: *they all ate the same spiritual food*. The reference is to the manna that sustained Israel forty years in the wilderness (Exod. 16:4, 35; Neh. 9:20; Ps. 78:24–25). Paul does not just say they ate manna or that they ate food; he identifies the food as *spiritual*, which again draws a parallel between Israel's experience and the experience of the church of Jesus Christ.

4. Israel did not just eat 'spiritual food' but also *drank the same spiritual drink.* The parallel between eating the bread and drinking the cup at the Lord's Supper is completed. Israel had sacramental experiences which anticipated the experience of believers in eating the bread and drinking the wine at the Lord's Supper. Paul elaborates and explains further how the drink was spiritual. The people of Israel *drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them*. The spirituality of the rock is again

underscored. The idea that the rock *accompanied* or 'followed' (CSB, *akolouthouses*), if taken literally, possibly stems from rabbinic tradition of a well that followed Israel in the wilderness. An allusion may also exist to Numbers 21:17: 'Spring up, O well! Sing about it.' It is equally possible, however, that the word 'followed' is not meant literally, which is suggested by the NIV's *accompanied*. Readers are sent back to the Old Testament story of the wilderness where Moses provided water for the people out of a rock (Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:7–11; Ps. 78:15–16). Perhaps Paul forged a connection between this text and the confession that God is 'the Rock' of Israel (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31). The water given to them in the wilderness came from the Rock which was unlike any other rock—in other words, the true God is radically different from idols (Deut. 32:31). Perhaps Paul reads the Old Testament claim that God is a rock in positing that Christ is the rock, showing that he is not thinking of the rock physically, but spiritually. Such an interpretation fits with what we often find in New Testament writers: what is attributed to Yahweh in the Old Testament is applied to Jesus Christ (e.g. Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 10:9; Phil. 2:10–11). Paul's purpose, as we have seen, is to draw the closest connection possible between Israel and the church. He does not want the Corinthians to dismiss his admonitions by claiming that Old Testament Israel is too distant from the church to be an apt parallel; in reality, Christ was with Israel too.

5. The blessings Israel received have been duly noted in verses 1–4, anticipating the blessings of new covenant believers. Paul has set the readers up for the hammer blow in verse 5 by reciting at some length the advantages of the wilderness generation. Despite all these blessings, *God was not pleased with most of them*. The proof that God did not approve of the majority is that they 'were struck down' (CSB) *in the wilderness*. The account of Israel's failure to believe and enter the land is relayed in Numbers 14. Other New Testament writers refer to this incident and admonish believers by reminding them of Israel's failure (Heb. 3:17; Jude 5). Hebrews applies this same incident in Israel's history to entering God's rest (Heb. 3:7–4:13), arguing that if Israel did not enter its earthly rest on account of its unbelief and disobedience, so believers must beware that they do not lose their heavenly rest for the same reasons. Here Paul makes a similar argument. If Israel in the wilderness was judged after receiving so many blessings, believers must be vigilant as well. They must not think they are exempt from God's judgment.

6. Verses 6–10 record five examples of Israel's sins in the wilderness. The way Paul frames the discussion highlights the importance of Israel's history for the Corinthians. The stories from the wilderness generation function as *examples* (*typoi*) for the Corinthians. The history of Israel is not merely of antiquarian interest, but is appropriated and applied to the church of Paul's day, and relates specifically to the issue of idol food. The first example centres on evil desires: the Corinthians must not follow the example of Israel by *setting* [*their*] *hearts on evil*. Paul almost certainly alludes to Numbers 11:4 where some among Israel had 'greedy desires' (*epethymesan epithymian*, lxx). Paul uses the words 'desires' (*epithymetas*) and 'desired' (*epethymesan*), which is quite similar to the Greek of Numbers 11:4 (cf. also Num. 11:34). Psalm 106:14 also directs attention to the sinful desires of the wilderness generation—'They were seized with craving [*epethymesan epithymian*] in the wilderness'—where the lxx again emphasizes the evil desires present. The craving and desire are related to the sin of coveting (Exod. 20:17). Interestingly, the people craved meat, and the Corinthians crave food as well; thus a connection is forged with food offered to idols. Such craving is not considered a minor peccadillo, for those Israelites who were guilty of evil desire were 'struck … with a severe plague' (Num. 11:33). The Corinthians are warned about evil desires because they will lead to judgment, and they must avoid evil desires relative to idol food.

7. Israel's sin in verse 6 focused on sinful desires, and, in particular, sinful desires for food. Here the Corinthians are exhorted not to be idolaters, for Israel in the wilderness strayed in this way. An interesting connection between verses 6 and 7 should be noted. The sin in verse 6 is evil desire, but elsewhere in Paul coveting is identified as idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Even though a different Greek word is used in these latter texts for coveting (*pleonexia*), the words are in the same semantic range and the conception is the same. Here Paul indicts idolatry more specifically. He picks up on what is perhaps the most egregious and blatant example of idolatry in the Scriptures. Israel had just entered into covenant with the Lord, and had agreed to the covenant stipulations (Exod. 24:3–8). When

Moses went up onto Mount Sinai, however, Israel turned quickly away from the covenant requirements and made a golden calf (Exod. 32:8; cf. Exod. 20:4). The quotation comes from Exodus 32:6. It is no accident that Paul selects the verse which describes Israel committing idolatry while eating and drinking. The warning to the Corinthians is clear: they too will be guilty of idolatry if they eat and drink in an idol's temple. The words *indulge in revelry* in the citation, according to Paul, denote idolatry, and the Corinthians will be guilty of the same if they eat food offered to idols in temples.

8. The third warning from the journey of Israel in the wilderness comes from Numbers 25. The Corinthians are warned about following the example of Israel by indulging in sexual immorality. We have already seen in 1 Corinthians 6:18 that the Corinthians were exhorted to 'flee from sexual immorality'. The account in Numbers 25, when read in its wider context, applies to the Corinthian situation in a fascinating way. The men of Israel engaged in sexual relations with Moabite women (Num. 25:1). What is especially interesting for our purposes surfaces in verse 2: 'The women invited them to the sacrifices for their gods, and the people ate and bowed in worship to their gods' (CSB). The chronology is not clear; thus it is not evident whether sexual sin preceded the feasts where they ate in the temples of idols. Incidentally, the word 'idols' (*eidoloi*) is used twice in the Greek translation of verse 2. In any case, sexual sin is closely tied with idolatry, and particularly with eating sacrifices to other gods. The Lord's judgment was severe in that the leaders of Israel were executed (Num. 25:4–5), and 24,000 died in a plague (Num. 25:9). Eating food offered to idols in the temple repristinates what Israel did at Baal Peor.

Another interesting question arises as to why we find 23,000 in Paul and 24,000 in the Old Testament account. No definitive answer can be given to resolve the difficulty. Some have argued that actually 23,500 died, and Paul rounds down to 23,000 while Numbers rounds up to 24,000. The solution is possible, but we have no way of determining if it is true. Perhaps there was another tradition circulating in Paul's day that 23,000 died, but again we have no evidence, and such a theory is a guess. The Old Testament text is not always secure in transmitting numbers. Perhaps our perplexity and questions derive from the precision expected in our culture. Rounding off numbers and using approximations was quite common in the ancient world; hence the discrepancy between 23,000 and 24,000 may have seemed like a non-issue to the original readers. Garland suggests that Paul merges the 3,000 who died in Exodus 32:28 with the 20,000-plus who died in this text, and this is certainly possible as well.

9. The fourth example relates to testing Christ. The Corinthians must not test Christ, as some in Israel did. On account of Israel's sin, many were bitten by snakes and died (Num. 21:5–9). John also draws on this story, emphasizing a different point, namely, that those who believe may be saved from judgment (John 3:14–15). Paul emphasizes not those who were saved but those who were judged. The word used for judgment—'destroyed' (*ap llynto*)—has to do with physical death in Numbers 21. Actually, the word for the judgment in Numbers 21:6 is 'died' (*apethanen*), but Paul uses the word 'destroyed' instead. The term 'destroyed' can refer to physical death, which was certainly the judgment inflicted on Israel, but the word is also often used by Paul to denote eschatological destruction (Rom. 2:12; 14:15; 1 Cor. 1:18, 19; 8:11; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10). If Israel was punished physically, Paul warns the Corinthians about the final eschatological judgment here. The judgment of Israel in redemptive history points to and anticipates a greater and more serious judgment, one that is eternal and not merely temporal.

Paul forges a tight connection between the testing of Israel and the danger facing the Corinthians. The best textual reading says that they *test[ed] Christ*. The use of the word 'test' is also illuminating since the word does not occur in Numbers 21:5–9. We have Paul's reading and interpretation of the narrative. We see elsewhere that Israel tested the Lord 'by demanding the food they craved' (Ps. 78:18; cf. also 78:41, 56). The Corinthians would be testing God if they ate food in a temple devoted to idols, and judgment would be the consequence.

10. The fifth and final example calls on the Corinthians not to grumble and complain as Israel did (cf. Phil. 2:14). Israel grumbled about lack of food (Exod. 16:1–3, 7, 8) and water (Exod. 15:24; 17:7), about the difficulty of travelling in the wilderness (Num. 11:1), about the leadership of Aaron (Num. 16:11),

about the death of Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their families (Num. 16:41) and especially about the Lord's promise that he would bring them into the land of promise (Num. 14:2, 27, 29, 36; Deut. 1:27; Ps. 106:24). The importance of the command is clear when we examine Philippians 2:14–15, for we see there that those who grumble are not the true 'children of God'. Those who grumble are 'warped and crooked', and we have a clear allusion to Deuteronomy 32:5 where Israel is described as a 'warped and crooked generation'. Therefore, Moses declared about the Israelites, 'They are … not his children' (Deut. 32:5). Grumbling is a significant detour from the Lord, and Paul confirms such here in asserting that those who grumbled in the Old Testament were *killed by the destroying angel*. The *destroying angel* is probably a general description of the judgments inflicted for grumbling, including the fire destroying the complainers (Num. 11:1–3), the destruction of Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their followers (Num. 16:22–35), and the exclusion of the wilderness generation from the Promised Land. Again, Paul uses the word 'destroyed' (apōlyonto) to designate the judgment, which points again to the eschatological judgment of believers if they give in to sin as Israel did.

11. The incidents noted in verses 6–10 are now explained as to their significance. Israel's experiences were never meant for Israel alone but had an exemplary purpose from the outset, that is, God designed salvation history so that the life of Israel would function typologically (*typikos*, rendered here as *examples*). The experience of the church of Jesus Christ corresponds to and replicates to a remarkable degree the experience of Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:10). It is not that the events are only recognized to be typological retrospectively; rather, they were intended by God as types from the outset. This is not to say that the parallels are similar in every respect, since a common feature of typology is escalation, that is, the antitype is greater than the type. For instance, the sacrifice of Christ is the antitype to the sacrifice of animals, but the fulfilment is clearly greater than the type. So, too, the church of Jesus Christ, as the recipient of new covenant promises, enjoys greater access to God and superior blessings than did ancient Israel. Still, the history of Israel is not cut off from the life of the church. In this case, the fall of Israel in the wilderness constitutes a warning for the church. The church cannot claim that the failure of Israel is irrelevant by clinging to promises of divine preservation. Rather, the warnings are one of the means by which the promises of divine protection are secured.

The understanding of typology offered here fits with the claim that *the culmination of the ages* has come for believers in Jesus Christ. The notion that the last days, the end of history, have arrived in Jesus Christ is common in the New Testament. John announces that it is 'the last hour' (1 John 2:18) and Peter proclaims that 'the end of all things is near' (1 Pet. 4:7). God has 'spoken' to his people 'in these last days' through his Son (Heb. 1:2) and he has poured out his Spirit 'in the last days' (Acts 2:17–18). All of history and God's covenants find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The last days have been inaugurated but not consummated in Jesus Christ. The history of Israel, then, is for the sake of believers in Jesus Christ and for the Corinthians in particular. They see from Israel's response to God in the wilderness how fatal it is to disbelieve in and disobey God.

12. The lesson that the Corinthians must particularly draw from Israel's history relates to self-confidence, which really amounts to self-presumption. The grace given to them in Jesus Christ is truly extraordinary and powerful. Nonetheless, they must not think that they have no need for vigilance. They will only 'stand' (*estanai*) if they consider and avoid the prospect of falling. Paul often uses the word 'stand' to designate perseverance. For instance, Paul warns believers that they will be cut off from the olive tree, severed from the people of God, unless they continue to 'stand by faith' (Rom. 11:20; cf. 2 Cor. 1:24). On the other hand, in Romans 14:4 he assures believers that the Lord will give them the grace to stand, that is, to persevere until the end. In 1 Corinthians 15:1–2 the Corinthians are said to stand in the gospel, but Paul immediately calls upon them to continue in faith (see also Eph. 6:11, 13, 14). Similarly, the verb 'fall' (*pipto*) often designates apostasy—falling away from the faith. We see this again in Paul's admonition in Romans 11:22: those who fall away will face God's severe judgment. Hence, Israel's fall (*epesan*) in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:8) warns the church not to follow the same course. In the same way, Paul contrasts 'standing' and 'falling' in Romans 14:4 (cf. Gal. 5:1; 2 Thess. 2:15). The warning is not designed to instil terror or to paralyse the Corinthians, nor is it a call to introspection. Paul does not cast doubt upon their spiritual status as believers. Such warnings are not a threat to assurance, for those who heed the warnings grow in their assurance.

COMMENTARY NOTES

13. Verse 13 confirms that promise and warning work together to strengthen the Corinthians as they run the race to the end (1 Cor. 9:24–27). Paul warns them against presumption, but he then assures them of God's faithfulness. The temptation they are facing is not atypical or extraordinary, but accords with the experience of all people everywhere (cf. Jas 1:13–14). In such temptations, particularly the temptation to apostatize—which is here represented by eating food offered to idols—God is faithful. He does not abandon his people in the midst of temptations to sin, even if the temptation is quite strong in that the Corinthians would be cut off from society if they did not accept invitations to the temples of false gods.

The focus in the verse is not actually on temptation in general, but, in context, on the temptation to apostatize, as the failure of Israel (10:1–10) and the subsequent verses (10:14–22) verify. God's faithfulness is such that he will not allow the temptation to exceed the capacity of believers. He also provides believers with the ability to withstand the temptation. God's grace is such that he gives believers the resolve to resist the temptation which beckons them, and they are thus able to withstand the temptation, which in this case is the desire to eat food offered to idols.

The assertion that God *is faithful* is consistently tied in Paul's thought to a divine pledge to sustain his people until the end. The Corinthians are assured that they will be 'blameless' till the end, and the basis of this promise is that 'God is faithful' (1 Cor. 1:8–9). Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul prays that believers will be 'kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ', and then assures them that the petition will be fulfilled since the God 'who calls you is faithful' (1 Thess. 5:24). So also, in 2 Thessalonians 3:3 the Lord's faithfulness reveals itself in protecting and keeping believers from Satan, which is another way of saying that they will be guarded from committing apostasy. We read in 2 Timothy 2:13 that believers may be 'faithless', yet Christ 'remains faithful', which means that those who sin by being faithless do not sin irreparably and thus are saved from final destruction. All of the texts that affirm the faithfulness of God or Christ occur in contexts that promise final salvation.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 10:14–22

Gordon Fee, In the *NICNT*, xpounds upon Paul's command to flee idolatry:

14 With a very strong inferential "therefore," Paul brings the preceding argument to its logical conclusion.548 In what has preceded (vv. 1–12) he showed by way of example that Israel's "idolatry" had caused their overthrow in the desert, despite their regular partaking of a "divine meal." Having warned Corinth of the same possibility (vv. 11–12), he now concludes with both a tender appeal, "my dear friends," and a straightforward prohibition, "flee550 from idolatry." The appeal is an appropriate one to follow the prior word of warning and assurance (v. 13). "God will provide a way out of genuine trials," he assures them, but "my dearly loved brothers and sisters, that does not include headlong pursuit of idolatry." This usage is reminiscent of an earlier moment (4:14), where after a long and frequently combative argument with them, Paul uses similar language to remind them that they are his dear children—despite the vigor with which he has had to argue with them. The word for "idolatry" is the equivalent of the personal noun "idolators" used earlier (5:10–11 and 10:7; cf. 6:9), suggesting both that eating in the temple precincts is involved (10:7) and probably that Paul had previously forbidden the practice in his earlier letter (5:9). On the use of such a prohibition following a primarily theological argument, note two earlier moments in this letter (6:18 and 8:13).

15 The preceding prohibition (v. 14) is both abrupt and absolute. Now Paul seeks to show them how sensible it is, based on their own experience of the Lord's Table. Since the Corinthians had prided themselves in their understanding of things, and surely had intimated as much in their letter to him, Paul allows: "I speak as to sensible554 people." Although he had earlier used this same language in biting irony (4:10), it seems less likely that he intends it so here. Similar to an earlier instance (5:3) the "as" refers to an actual reality, not a merely hypothetical one. Since they are sensible people by their

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 199–208.

own admission, he chooses here, as he will again later (in 11:13 and 14:20), to appeal to them as such: "judge for yourselves what I say," meaning in this case, "what I am about to say." But he does not mean "judge for yourselves" as to its rightness or wrongness.556 They are to judge for themselves that their apostle is right!

16 This is one of two passages (along with 11:17–34) where Paul refers to the Lord's Supper. For that reason it has received an understandably large amount of attention. In this case it is especially important to observe that this meal is *not* the present focus of Paul's concern; rather the focus here is on the sacred pagan meals soon to be addressed (vv. 19–21). What is said here thus serves as the *presupposition* for what he will say later. On the basis of their (probably) common, and for Paul *proper*, understanding of the nature of their own sacred meal, as well as a biblical understanding of that of Israel (v. 18), he appeals to their common sense as to why they may not attend the pagan meals, precisely because this could only be considered a form of idolatry. That means, therefore, that here one can indeed learn a great deal about Paul's understanding of the Lord's Table, but since his focus is only on what is genuinely similar between the two meals, not everything can be learned here.

What he argues is that there is something inherent in the nature of the Christian meal that makes participation in the other absolutely incompatible. That something he describes as *koinonia* ("fellowship, participation"). Precisely what he intended by that term is problematic; at the same time it is the focal point of one of the deep rifts within the Christian church—namely, over the proper understanding of the nature of the Christian sacred meal and of the relationship with Christ that inheres in it. The problem has to do with whether Paul's point—or emphasis—is that in sacred meals one has *koinonia* with the deity (in the Christian's case, with Christ himself), or with fellow participants in the meal as they worship the deity by sacrifice and by eating in the deity's honor. Most likely the solution lies somewhere in between. The linguistic and literary evidence indicates that *koinonia* has to do with the worshipers themselves; but the basis and focus of their worship was the deity, who in most cases was considered to be in some way present among them.

First, then, there can be little doubt that Paul intends to emphasize the kind of bonding relationship of the worshipers with one another that this meal expresses; indeed, the next sentence (v. 17) seems to make this certain. It should be noted that the present sequence, cup-bread, is unique to the NT.561 The evidence from later on (11:23–25), however, makes it clear that the standard sequence, bread-cup, prevailed in the Pauline churches. The reason for the unusual order, therefore, seems to be that Paul has chosen here to interpret the *bread* in light of the present argument, an interpretation that emphasizes the solidarity of the fellowship of believers created by their all sharing "the one loaf."563

At the same time, however, the distinctively religious nature of these feasts indicates that *worship of the deity* was involved, and therefore that they most likely considered the deity also to be present in some way at the meal. This is especially so in Judaism, in which the Israelites are expressly commanded to eat "in the presence of Yahweh." This at least means in his sanctuary; since sacrifice preceded the meal, Yahweh himself was probably understood to be "present" at that meal in a unique way. So also in the pagan meals, since at least one of the papyrus invitations suggests that the god himself will act as host. But this is especially true of the Christian meal. Not only did Jesus himself host the first of such meals, but the early church understood him to be present by the Spirit in their gatherings (cf. 5:3–5). This is most likely how we are also to understand their use of the prayer *Maranatha* (see on 16:22).

But what the evidence does not seem to allow is a sacramental understanding of the meal itself, as if they were "participating in the Lord" by the actual eating of the food, as though the food were the Lord himself. Neither the language and grammar nor the example of Israel nor the examples from the pagan meals allow such a meaning.566 The "fellowship," therefore, was most likely a celebration of their common life in Christ, based on the new covenant in his blood that had previously bound them together in union with Christ by his Spirit. But while their "fellowship" was with one another, its basis and focus were in Christ, his death and resurrection; they were thus together in his presence, where as host at his table Christ shared anew with them the benefits of the atonement. It is this unique relationship *between believers and with their Lord*, celebrated at this meal, that makes impossible

similar associations with other "believers" at the tables of demons. In this passage the cup seems to focus on the vertical dimension, the bread on the horizontal (cf. v. 21).

Thus Paul begins with the cup: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?" The NIV translators chose to render "the cup of blessing" as "the cup of thanksgiving," apparently because that has become the more common word for the Christian understanding of this meal (cf. 11:24), and it thus became a kind of fixed feature in most Protestant celebrations of this meal. Unfortunately, however, that rendering causes one to miss the rich Jewish background of this language. "Blessings" offered to the Creator for his bounty were a common part of Jewish meals. The "cup of blessing" was the technical term for the final blessing offered at the end of the meal. This was the cup that our Lord blessed at the Last Supper (cf. 11:25, "after supper") and interpreted as "the new covenant in my blood." Hence the early church took over the language of this blessing to refer to the cup of the Lord's Table,570 adding only that it is "the cup of blessing *which we bless*," to distinguish it from all others, especially the "cup of demons" (v. 21).

Paul's concern, of course, is that the drinking of this cup is for believers "a sharing in the blood of Christ." As noted above, there is little evidence that the food of sacred meals was understood to be an eating of the deity. Since, therefore, the cup is specifically interpreted by the Lord (cf. Mark 14:24), and continued to be so understood in the early church (1 Cor. 11:25), as "my blood of the new covenant," this language almost certainly refers to their sharing in the provisions and benefits of that covenant. This also means that they did not consider their table to be an altar where sacrifice was taking place, but a fellowship meal where in the presence of the Spirit they were by faith looking back to the singular sacrifice that had been made and were thus realizing again its benefits in their lives. In this way they shared "in the blood of Christ." Paul's own point, seldom noted in the contemporary church, is that the Corinthian believers' being thus joined together in Christ through his blood makes it impossible for them also to join pagan meals where the focus was equally on the "deity" involved—although Paul must go on to explain that the nonexistent deity does in fact have reality, as a demon.

Similarly, Paul speaks of "the bread *that we* break." This also picks up the language of the Jewish meal and was used by the earliest believers to designate their fellowship meal (cf. Acts 2:46; 20:7, 11). What is unique here is that Paul will go on to interpret the bread in terms of the *church* as Christ's "body." Nowhere else in the NT is the bread interpreted at all.572 Paul does so here probably because in this context the emphasis lies here. Thus he does not mean that by eating the bread believers have some kind of mystical "participation in" the "broken body" of Christ, but, as he clearly interprets next, they are herewith affirming that through Christ's death they are "partners" in the redeemed community, the new eschatological people of God.

17 In some ways Paul's sentence looks as if he were taking a momentary digression, perhaps anticipating the problem to be addressed a bit later (11:17–34) and thus taking a sideswipe at their divisiveness. But since the sequence cup-bread most likely came about precisely for the sake of this explanatory word, it probably is crucial to our understanding of the present argument. This explanation is what indicates most strongly that *koin nia* refers to the common sharing in the Lord's Supper that binds *them* together as a unique, eschatological community. Their singular existence as the people of God, bound together to their Lord through the benefits of the cross and experienced regularly at his table, makes all other such meals idolatry. Paul's point, therefore, is not the *unity* of the body that this meal represents (although it probably anticipates that concern as well), but the *solidarity* of the redeemed community as one body in Christ that forbids all other such unions.

He makes that point using the analogy of the bread. In a chiastic pattern, whose logic is not as clear as the actual point being made, he says:

Because there is one loaf,	A
we who are many are one body;	B
for we all partake	B^1
of the one loaf.	A^1

The first clause is a direct reflection on the final words that have just preceded. At the table they all share a common loaf, which the Lord had identified as his "body" (cf. 11:24). Paul now asserts that the "body" in that identification is to be understood analogically as the church, who even though they "are many" are "one body" because there is one loaf at the table. Even though the analogy is clear, the logic of that sentence is not immediate, so he adds the explanation, "for576 we all partake of578 the one loaf." By common "participation" in the single loaf, the "body of Christ," they affirm that they together make up the "body of Christ," which in turn implies that they may not likewise become partners in similar associations that honor demons. He is not thereby suggesting that they *become* that body through this meal; a bit later (12:13) he says that happened through their common "immersion" in the Spirit. Rather, by this meal they affirm what the Spirit has already brought about through the death and resurrection of Christ. On the use of the "body" metaphor for the believing community, see further on 11:29 and 12:12–13.

18 As earlier (9:13–14), but now in reverse order, Paul adds the further analogy of the sacred meals in Israel. "Consider the people of Israel," he says, intending to argue his case one step further. "Are not those who eat the sacrifices *koinonoi* (partners, sharers, participants) in the altar?" The context indicates that Paul is referring to the meals prescribed in the OT (Deut. 14:22–27), not to the priests' share of the sacrifice alluded to earlier (9:13). The language "eat the sacrifices" refers to the meal that followed the actual sacrifice, in which they together ate portions of the sacrificed food. Since there is not the remotest hint in Judaism that the sacrificial food represented God in some way,584 Paul can only mean by "sharers in the altar" that the participants shared together in the food on the altar. Paul's emphasis seems to be that by this meal they were thus bound together in their common worship of Yahweh. By analogy such people were not allowed also to join the sacrificial meals of their neighbors, and when they did so, it was clearly considered idolatry (cf. vv. 7–8).

The probable reason for this second example is that it is more closely analogous to the pagan meals, which also involved sacrifice, followed by a meal in which the sacrificial food was eaten. The Christian meal was only an analogy of a sacred *meal*; their sacrifice had been offered once-for-all, and though now celebrated at the meal, was not a part of the meal, as in the Jewish and pagan meals.

19 Paul now proceeds to apply the preceding analogies (vv. 16–18), but does so (rhetorically) by going back to the argument of their letter. They have argued that eating idol food, meaning eating meals at the temples, cannot have any bearing on one's Christian life, since there is only one God, which in turn means that an idol cannot have genuine reality (8:4). Since Paul has been arguing that there *is* religious significance to the Lord's Table and to the sacrificial meals of Israel, he must now qualify their argument in light of that reality. "Do I mean then" by the preceding argument "that sacrificial food is anything"?587 Of course not, is the intended response. That we "share in the blood and body of Christ" is not to be understood that there is genuine significance to the food eaten at pagan meals, as if it were actually sacrificed to a "god." Nor does he mean to imply that "an idol is anything." No, on this point they are agreed; an idol has no reality, in the sense that an idol does not in fact represent what might truly be called a "god." But what the Corinthians have failed to discern right along is that to say an idol is not a god does not mean that it does not represent supernatural powers. Indeed, it is quite the opposite, as he will now go on to explain next.

20 To the contrary, Paul says, the preceding argument does not imply reality to idols. Rather, the Corinthians are to understand idolatry in terms of OT revelation: "The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to a being who might rightly be termed God." By changing the tense of the verb,591 Paul contemporizes the language of the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:17). Israel in the desert had rejected God their Rock for beings who were no gods, indeed who were demons. Although the OT itself contains no theological reflection on this understanding of idolatry, almost certainly it was the natural development of Israel's realization that the "mute" gods of the pagans did in fact have supernatural powers. Since there was only one God, such power could not be attributed to a god; hence the belief arose that idols represented demonic spirits.

From that piece of revelation Paul proceeds to apply the stinger: "And I do not want you to be *koinonous* (sharers, partners) in demons." Here the argument from the Table of the Lord, as well as

the additional argument from Israel's history, now comes into perspective. The food eaten at the pagan meals has been sacrificed to demons; that means that those at the table are sharers in what has been sacrificed to demons in the same way that Israel shared in what had been sacrificed to God. Since at the Lord's Table no sacrifice is now involved, it took the additional illustration from Israel to give clarity to this present assertion. Paul's point is simple: These pagan meals are in fact sacrifices to demons; the worship of demons is involved. One who is already bound to one's Lord and to one's fellow believers through participation at the Lord's Table cannot under any circumstances also participate in the worship of demons. That point will be made explicit in the parallel sentences that follow.

21 But Paul does not merely "not want" them to be participants in the demonic. Using the starkest kind of language he asserts: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot share at the Table of the Lord and the table of demons." These words function as both warning and prohibition. They warn in terms of the following rhetorical questions (v. 22); they prohibit in the sense of pointing out the absolute incompatibility of the two actions. One is not merely eating with friends at the pagan temples; one is engaged in idolatry, idolatry that involves an association with demons.

One should not make more of rhetoric than an author intends. But it is noteworthy that Paul pronounces this prohibition in terms of the two elements of the Lord's Table, in the sequence given above (v. 16). First, one "drinks the cup of the Lord"; therefore, one may not likewise "drink the cup of demons." The parallel in this case does not rest with a cup at pagan meals known as the "cup of Sarapis" or the like. The language is taken from the Christian meal, and in particular drinking the cup of the Lord points to the vertical dimension of that meal, that is, to the binding covenantal relationship one has with Christ through the benefits of his "blood." By analogy one cannot likewise have such a relationship with the "demon" Sarapis. The two are mutually exclusive.

Second, one "shares in the table596 of the Lord." This echoes Paul's earlier language (vv. 16b–17), where the focus is on the horizontal dimension of the table. Those who eat at the Lord's Table, proclaiming his death until he comes (11:26), are thereby also bound to one another through the death of the Lord that is thus celebrated. So also with pagans. Theirs is a sacred "fellowship" in honor of demons. Those who are bound to one another through Christ cannot also become "fellows" (= be in partnership) with those whose meals are consecrated to demons.

22 This final set of questions brings the argument as it was resumed at the beginning (10:1) to its conclusion as a strong word of warning. The questions are joined to the preceding sentence by an untranslated "or," which implies that it offers some kind of alternative to what was just said. Most likely Paul intends: "*Or* will you continue eating at both meals, and thus arouse the Lord's jealousy, as Israel did in the desert?" That is put in the form of a rhetorical question, "Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy[600]?" With these words Paul continues the allusion to the Song of Moses (in this case to Deut. 32:21) begun earlier (v. 4) and carried further in the preceding emphatic disclaimer (v. 20), where precisely for its idolatry Israel was rejected by the Lord. The term "jealousy" is a reflection of the OT motif of God's self-revelation (Exod. 20:5), related to his holiness and power, in which God is to be understood as so absolutely without equal that he will brook no rivals to Israel's undivided devotion.

The precise intent of the final question, "Are we stronger than he?" is more puzzling. Most likely this is the final warning that God's "jealousy" cannot be challenged with impunity. Those who would put God to the test by insisting on their right to what Paul insists is idolatry are in effect taking God on, challenging him by their actions, daring God to act. Secure in their own foolhardiness, they think of themselves as so "strong" that they can challenge Christ himself (cf. Isa. 45:9–10). But their folly, implied in an earlier exhortation (9:25) and given in the preceding warning (10:12), is that they will thereby fail to gain the final eschatological prize. In any event, the question calls for "an emphatic negative response."

COMMENTARY NOTES

The argument has now come full circle. For modern readers it may seem terribly convoluted; but it probably was not at all so for its first readers, for whom this was a response to their letter. 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. Thus he appeals, exhorts, and finally warns that such attendance is absolutely forbidden. But the matter is not completely finished. Not everything is absolute; there are still matters of indifference—even about things that are tangentially idolatrous. So Paul must yet speak to the issue of "rights" and "freedom" on those matters, which is the concern of the final section (10:23–11:1).

In a variety of ways this paragraph has continued to be a Word for the church. Converts in Third World settings, of course, often have an immediacy with it that many others do not, as they struggle over the religious intent of meals of various kinds, sometimes even in their ancestral homes, where the meal is eaten in honor of the "god." In Western churches interest in the text has usually been over the reversed order of cup and bread (vv. 16–17)—with some passing historical interest in the rest—which probably says far more about us than it does about them(!). What Paul is finally forbidding is any kind of relationship with the demonic. How that translates into modern Western cultures may be moot; probably what most Western Christians need to learn is that the demonic is not as remote as some of us would wish to believe.

But at a much deeper level is the hermeneutical issue raised by H. F. von Soden, who suggested that Paul does not really forbid temple attendance per se, but only that which has as its clear intent the worship of idol-demons. He argued that Paul throughout is trying to move both the weak and strong beyond their present positions, by reforming the "magical" view of the sacrament held by the strong (= improper sacramentalism) but at the same time rejecting any legal regulation imposed by the weak (= legalism). While these are proper concerns, it is especially doubtful that this is *Paul's* intent here. Rather, the concern is between what is in fact absolute and what are merely *adiaphora* (matters of indifference) for those who have been radicalized by their new existence in Christ.

Without returning to law, meaning law as a means to right standing with God, the Christian faith has inherent within it something so radical that it absolutizes certain behavior. Being members of one body in Christ makes it quite impossible to be involved in idolatrous practices. Fundamental allegiance is at stake. One cannot serve God *and* mammon—or demons, whatever form they may take in our modern world. Sitting at *the* table and experiencing its benefits of grace and freedom does not give one license for religious or moral licentiousness. Rather, it binds us to one another in common fellowship around Christ and the new covenant in such a way that our behavior in the new age is radicalized toward "the law of Christ" (9:21).[2]

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23–11:1

In the *Pillar Bible Commentary*, Roy Ciampa considers how Paul believes we ought to use our freedom:

Paul quotes from a Corinthian slogan, twice, and responds to it, twice (10:23), before providing a general moral principle to guide Christians in their relationships with others (10:24). That is followed up by a series of instructions intended to address both specific scenarios (10:25–30) and general guidelines (10:31–11:1).

10:23 In 9:24–10:22 Paul focused especially on the threat to one's own spiritual (and general) health and well-being posed by a lack of self-restraint with respect to idol food. In 10:23–11:1 he returns to focus again on the question of the danger posed to the well-being of others (cf. 8:1–9:23). As Paul

[2] 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), 512–524.

moves toward the conclusion of this negative section on idolatry, he cites the same slogan from the Corinthians' letter that he cited back at 6:12 (see the comments there): *"I have the right to do anything."* Here, as there, he cites the slogan once and then qualifies it and then cites it a second time and provides a second qualification. In both verses he qualifies the slogan the same way the first time (*but not everything is beneficial*), but the second qualification is different in each case. While in 6:12 the second qualifier is "I will not be mastered by anything," here the second qualification is that *not everything is constructive*. The word translated constructive is usually translated "edifies" (as in TNIV 14:4 [2x], 17) or "builds up" (as in TNIV 8:1). The TNIV translation reflects a creative usage of the building/construction imagery but may keep people from seeing the relationship with the motif. It should also be pointed out that in English for something to be "constructive" usually means that it is helpful or advances a discussion or a cause. In this letter the building metaphor is more directly related to the well-being of a person or a community (which is how "edify" or "build up" have come to be used in the spiritual vocabulary of English-speaking Christians).

While both texts (6:12 and 10:23) discuss what is beneficial, the first one follows up with a stronger emphasis on one's own well-being (not to be mastered by anything), while the latter text follows up with a greater emphasis on the well-being of others (that they should be edified). That is reflected in the emphasis given to those issues in the two sections. They affect both the individual and the group, but Paul puts somewhat more emphasis on the welfare of the self in his discussion of sexual immorality (esp. in 6:12–20) and somewhat more emphasis on the welfare of others in his discussion of idol food (esp. in 8:1–9:23; 10:23–11:1). This verse marks the shift back to a focus on the well-being of others, which continues through the end of this major section. Paul indicates that our behavior should not be dictated by what we may consider to be our rights or what freedoms we may have, but by that which will benefit (ourselves and especially) others and will make for individual Christians who are stronger in their faith and commitment to Christ and a Christian community which is stronger in its unified reflection of the lordship of Jesus Christ. As Fee puts it, Paul's focus is on using one's "rights" "to 'benefit' and 'build up' others in the body." At the end of chapter 8, evidently the practices of some Corinthians in eating idol food has served not to build up the community or the spiritual health of their brothers and sisters in Christ but to bring (or threaten to bring) destruction (see on 8:9–13).

10:24 Paul clarifies whose benefit and edification should preoccupy us (cf. v. 23) by way of an aphorism or crisply stated moral principle which was likely a consistent part of his moral teaching: *No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.* Paul teaches the same principle as an attribute of love in 13:5, and it also appears in Romans 14:7; 15:2; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:1–7. It is understood to be based on the model of Christ, for whom all things, including the sacrifice of his own life, were done for the benefit of others. Chrysostom and Thiselton both point out that Paul's teaching in this verse had already been more fully unpacked earlier. Chrysostom thinks that Paul can express his thought so concisely here because he had made the point at length in 9:19–23, showing that he had used his own rights and liberty for the benefit and in the service of others. Given that prior exposition, he was content to make the point briefly here and to use these few words to prod them to recall what had been said in that earlier passage. Thiselton points out that "Paul's demonstration of how this axiom should operate at Corinth has been set forth in 8:7–13, where concern for the brother or sister for whom Christ died takes priority over one's own concerns."

The "others" Paul has in mind are understood by the contrast with oneself. It is not any other person in particular, but precisely anyone who would be overlooked and suffer the consequences of our selfish preoccupation with our own rights and benefits. Verse 32 suggests that in the Corinthians' situation those others might be fellow believers (members of the church of God) or unbelieving Jews or Gentiles—which are the broadest possible categories Paul could have expressed.

10:25–26 How Paul's principle, stated in v. 24, impinges on the ways the Corinthians should handle a couple different situations where they may be confronted with the possibility of consuming idol food is sketched out in vv. 25–30. The two particular contexts he discusses are the two easiest and most innocent ways to come into contact with idol food: at the marketplace or at a dinner hosted

by a friend, neighbor, or patron. It is not clear whether vv. 28–30 should be understood as explicitly qualifying the Christian's freedom in both scenarios (vv. 25–26 and v. 27) or only the second of them (while implicitly qualifying the Christian's freedom in the first scenario as well). The structural parallel between v. 25 and v. 27b suggests that Paul's remarks in vv. 28–30 explain why one should not raise questions of conscience in either situation and thus apply to any situation where a Christian is informed that the food they are about to eat (or purchase to eat) was previously offered to an idol. In short, Paul's comments qualify a Christian's freedom in any circumstance where their behavior may be reasonably interpreted by others as participation in or support of idolatry.

Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience (v. 25). That is, they need not (and should not) ask any questions about the potential religious history of the food for sale. The market to which Paul refers would have been a meat market "that sold other food provisions as well." Paul's statement makes sense on the assumption that much of the food sold there (esp. the meat) would have been previously offered to one god or another but that the possible religious history of any particular piece of meat or other food would not be immediately apparent to the shopper. One could perhaps discover any possible religious history by asking the seller, but Paul discourages the Corinthians from doing so. Why they should feel free to eat any food sold in the market is clarified in v. 26. Why they should not ask questions that about the religious history of the food is further clarified in vv. 28–30. In order to discuss the significance of not asking questions of conscience we will have to anticipate our discussion of the significance of vv. 28–30.

By not asking questions about the food sold in the market the Christian allows for the possibility that they may in fact end up eating food that had previously been offered to an idol (which suggests Paul's issue must not be with the food per se). On the other hand, they eliminate the possibility that anyone will be able to interpret their purchase as one intended to condone or promote idolatry. To ask questions and refuse to eat food which is explicitly identified as idol food would seriously reduce the food options available. To ask questions and then go ahead and eat food that had been explicitly identified as idol food could be interpreted (by the one selling the food or by someone observing the transaction) as a willingness to be considered a supporter of or participant in the sacrifice that was made. To avoid asking questions was to avoid giving anyone the ability to associate the purchase with any religious intention on the part of the buyer.

The application of vv. 28–30 to this situation suggests that if the seller or another person were gratuitously to identify a certain piece of food as one that had been previously offered to an idol, the Christian would be expected to choose another piece of food instead in order to avoid making a purchase that could be misconstrued.

One of the questions that Paul needs to address is the question of whether food sacrificed to idols is inherently inconsumable due to what has been done to it, or whether the problem is primarily a matter of avoiding any clear personal association with, or participation in, the pagan offering itself. In v. 26 Paul cites Psalm 24:1 (*for*, "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it*") to explain why Christians should feel free to eat any food without having to know about its religious history. Psalm 24 boldly declares that the Lord, the God of Israel (and no other deity), is sovereign Lord over all the earth. The earth does not belong to Baal or to any other god, but to the Lord of Israel! *He* is the glorious King who reigns over all the earth and over all of its inhabitants! The rest of the psalm discusses the Lord's victory procession and the qualifications of those who may join it.273

According to Kraus, the two offenses in the psalm that are listed as precluding one from participating in the worship procession are the worship of idols and perjury. Commentators are divided as to the nature of the first qualification. As Broyles indicates, the "phrases are ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so, whether they forbid vain pursuits and lying/perjury in general or forbid appealing to idols (so NIV) and false gods in particular." The word used276 suggests "vain thing" and is sometimes used to refer to idols in a vague but derogatory manner (since they did not merit anything better). The first verse of the following psalm begins with the psalmist declaring "To you, Lord, I have lifted up my soul" (Ps. 25:1), suggesting a reference to worship, which is what it means to lift up one's soul

elsewhere in the Psalms (86:4; 143:8).

Psalm 24 closes with an emphasis on the identification of the Lord as the "King of glory," mentioned four times in the last five verses. Within those verses the motif of the Lord's strength (see on v. 22) is stressed: The king of glory is the Lord "strong and mighty," the Lord "mighty in battle."

Psalm 24:1 is most commonly cited in rabbinic literature to teach the obligation to thank God for one's food. On the basis of Psalm 24:1 it was taught that one should not taste any food until after having recited a benediction over it (t. Berakot 4:1; b. Berakot 35a; b. Šabbat 119a). Paul's citation of Psalm 24:1 is consistent with the prevalent Jewish understanding of its relevance for the way God's people approach the food that he graciously provides. Paul is thoroughly Jewish and biblical in his understanding that creation is good and that the food we receive has been provided for us by God and should be received with thanksgiving (cf. 1 Cor. 10:30) and with the understanding that food, like everything else in creation, exists to fulfill the purpose God has in mind for it, namely, his glory (see 1 Cor. 10:31). The doctrine of creation Paul finds in Psalm 24:1 indicates that there is nothing wrong with the food itself, regardless of the way others have misused it in their religious ignorance. Psalm 24:1 says, it all belongs *to the Lord*, and not to any god or demon to whom it may have been offered (regardless of what the pagans who offered it may have thought). As far as the Christian is concerned, whatever food is found in the market is part of God's gracious provision and should be thankfully received as such.

If Paul and the Corinthians would have read Psalm 24:4 as a reference to idolatry, a citation from the psalm could have simultaneously reminded them not only of the goodness of God's creation, but also of his sovereignty over all creation (with its references to his strength and might) and of the requirement that all those who recognize his sovereignty avoid involvement with idolatry or risk a confrontation with the strong and mighty king of glory! Paul draws an ethical application from the text's statement of God's ownership of and sovereignty over all creation. Since all food belongs to the Lord and comes from him, it can be received with thankfulness, regardless of how it has been used by others.

10:27 The particular concern regarding food sacrificed to idols and the contamination of idolatry from eating food in 10:27–30 is based on Exodus 34:15, which, in the midst of a passage preoccupied with the avoidance of contamination from idolatry, warns that the danger of allowing the inhabitants of the land to remain would be that "when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice." That verse was a key text in the development of an important strand of Jewish thinking on the whole issue of eating with Gentiles, as reflected in *Jubilees* 22:16, "Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated and despicable, and abominable." Along similar lines is Rabbi Shimeon ben Eleazar's teaching that "Israelites outside the land worship idols in purity. How? If a non-Jew prepared a wedding feast for his son and sent out to invite all Jews in his town—even if they have food and drink of their own and have their own servant waiting at them, they worship idols. Thus it is said: '[... Lest you make a covenant ... when they sacrifice to their gods and] when one invites you, you eat of his sacrifice' (Exod. 34:15)." The position of *Seder Elijah Rabbah* is similar: "One should observe in his heart not to eat with a gentile at table.... Thus they taught: anyone who eats with a gentile at table, worships idols and eats sacrifices to the dead."

Paul's permission to accept an invitation to a meal and to eat whatever is served (v. 27) would seem to contradict Exodus 34:15, but Paul's more detailed instructions (vv. 28–30) suggest that he has a simple dinner invitation in mind, and that the believer was to be careful to avoid eating any food that was explicitly identified as having been offered to an idol. This clearly does not follow the Jewish tradition cited above, but may still be understood as a more "liberal" approach to avoiding association with pagan sacrifices (and thus in the spirit of Exod. 34:15) while still allowing believers to maintain and develop social relationships with their non-believing neighbors.

COMMENTARY NOTES

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. The second most common and innocent way of coming into contact with idol food (after visiting the local meat market) would be that of accepting an invitation to a dinner hosted by a non-Christian friend, neighbor, or patron. Such dinners were extremely common and served as a key to establishing the social and political network that was essential to advancement and even social survival (for free people) in that society. Any respectable person would hope to be receiving invitations to dinners in the homes of others or hosted in other facilities, including the dining facilities which were incorporated into the precincts of some idol temples. To fail to receive such invitations would be a sign of social marginalization. To refuse to accept such invitations would tend to lead to social isolation. Paul recognizes that some of the Corinthians are receiving such invitations and will naturally want to accept them and maintain or improve their standing within the city's social world. The problem (and the reason Paul needs to address the issue) is that even when such meals were primarily social events, there were almost always religious components that could not be ignored. The wine would almost certainly be offered in the name of Dionysus, and gods were likely to be sung to or honored in other ways. Usually some of the food, at least, would have been previously offered to a god to whom thanks were being given for the joyful occasion of the dinner.

How could a Christian possibly navigate such a context without being seen as a willing participant in the idolatrous practices taking place? Some things go unstated but are probably assumed by Paul, including the presumption that Christians would not actually sing the praises of idols and that if they pronounced any name over their own cup of wine, it would be that of the Lord Jesus Christ. When he tells the Corinthian Christians to eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience, he is suggesting that they treat their food options at the meal the same way they would treat them in the market. His suggestion that they not ask questions of conscience certainly implies that the religious history of the food in question was not expected to be known with certainty by the guests. If it has not been made explicit, the Christian may feel free to eat without fear that their actions can be interpreted as idolatrous.

10:28 Food with an unknown (and potentially ambiguous) history is not a problem for the Christian (v. 27). *If*, however, *someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice,"* the Christian should not eat that particular food selection (*then do not eat it*). If that is the only food (or the main dish), it may place the Christian in a very awkward position, since a rejection of the host's food would be a serious *faux pas*. Paul is probably assuming, however that the meal (as would be typical) might be one in which many different food choices were being passed around. That would provide two different "ways of escape." First, in such a context one might not be expected to know which items had or had not previously been offered to an idol (or to the guests in the name of the idol) and which had not been used in a religious offering. Secondly, the Christian would not have to go without food altogether but could choose from those items that had not been explicitly associated with an idol. If the Christian could not simply choose strategically from the food offered at the dinner, they might feel the need from time to time to excuse him- or herself from the dinner. Dickson thinks that this could serve a positive function in the spread of the gospel. He argues plausibly that "the occasional withdrawal from pagan banquets hinted at in 10:28 would present a clear critique of paganism and would very likely lead to an opportunity for believers to explain or defend the Christian position, a scenario made all the more conceivable in light of the important place of 'table-talk' at Greco-Roman banquets."

Several questions remain about the scenario Paul describes. Is the person informing the Christian of the religious history of the food thought to be another Christian or a pagan, and why are they offering that information? Paul seems to depict the informant as a pagan since they do not use the pejorative term for "idol food" used elsewhere by Paul and other early Jews and Christians, but the neutral or positive term for "food offered to a god/divinity." They presumably mention 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. They could be merely interested in the Christian's response, or, more likely, they might think that they are helping the Christian by

informing them so that they might make an informed decision regarding whether or not they would abstain from eating that item.287 Paul is not interested in the particular motivation or specifics of the hypothetical situation. What seems to be important is that the Christian has been informed that the food had been offered to an idol and someone knows it to be so and knows that they are aware of it.

Paul says that in such a situation the Christian should abstain *both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience*. How does the Christian's behavior affect the one who informed him or her about the food? The friendly pagan was aware of Jewish/Christian scruples with respect to idol food and probably expected the Christian to abstain after discovering the food had a religious history. If the Christian does not abstain, their pagan friend may decide the Christian is not consistent with their own convictions, or is a hypocrite. Or they may decide that not even all Jews or Christians think that there is any serious problem with pagan religion. If their awareness of Jewish and Christian qualms had caused them to wonder about their own pagan practices, they would perhaps wonder or worry no further. Paul's initial reference to the particular concern for the other person was ambiguous. His concern for the sake of the one who told you and *for the sake of conscience could be taken as either "concern for the other person and their conscience*" or "concern for the other person and for your conscience." In vv. 29–30 he clarifies that he had the former in mind and why the other person's conscience is important for the Christian's ethical decision.

10:29–30 Paul clarifies that he has the other person's conscience in mind (*I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours*) and thus continues the motif of concern for "the other" which pervades this letter. He follows up with two more rhetorical questions that are intended to clarify (thus the For) why the Christian should be concerned about the conscience of the person who informs them of the idolatrous background of the food they are being offered. The meaning of the rhetorical questions has not been transparent to many readers, however, and they have wished that Paul had gone on to answer them! He asks, *For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?* The questions seem to discredit the other person's right to judge or denounce the behavior of the Christian who would eat the food identified as idol food. That is, they sound like the arguments of one justifying the practice of eating the food rather than those of one explaining why it should be rejected. Fee, in fact, thinks that Paul abandons the issue of the benefit of the other person and has suddenly turned to defending his own practice against those who criticize him. But, as Collins points out, Paul's use of the first-person singular in these two questions reflects "a classic construction in which the 'I' is used to illustrate something universal (BDF §281). Use of the first person in this way is especially characteristic of the diatribe." We need not, therefore, conclude that Paul has left the issue of the one who might eat such food in order to defend his own practice. Paul may be using himself as an example, but he is not defending his own practice of eating idol food here but explaining that he does not give anyone the opportunity to judge him as a consumer of idol food.

It is a Corinthian's own view of their freedom and their conviction that their own personal attitude toward the food (one of thanksgiving) is all that should matter, that may lead them to eat food which has been identified to them by someone else as idol food. The theme of freedom and rights has governed all of chapters 8–10 due to the role those concepts evidently played in the Corinthians' justification of their own approach to the issue of idol food. The theme of thanksgiving reflects the theme of blessing mentioned by Paul in v. 16 (we bless God, thanking him for the food he provides) and the reference to Psalm 24:1 in v. 26, which was understood to provide the reason for giving thanks for whatever good things we enjoy from God's creation. The citation of the verse probably served as an endorsement for one aspect of the understanding of the "knowledgeable." The point is that freedom and thankfulness are not (as some Corinthians might think) the keys to ethical discernment. Rather, not even one's freedom and thankfulness to God justify putting oneself in a situation where others' consciences may lead them to think idolatry is being practiced or condoned.

Paul suggests that the act of (purchasing and/or) eating such food may result in someone else judging them or denouncing them. Two key words in these verses are those used for the response to the Christian's decision to eat the food in question. First, "to be judged" here means more specifically

"to be unfavorably judged" (BDAG). To "be denounced" is to be spoken of "in a disrespectful way that demeans, denigrates, maligns" (BDAG), or, as Thiselton helpfully puts it, "to suffer defamation of character." As Thiselton further points out, Paul is raising the potential for the Christian to be maligned for being "inconsistent in belief and practice." Since the person pointed out to them that the food they were on the verge of purchasing or eating was idol food, they evidently expected the Christian's rejection of idolatry to require them to avoid such food.

The rhetorical question in v. 29 begins Why, or more specifically, "For what reason," "To what end," or, as Findlay has suggested, "What good end will be served by …?"296 Given Paul's general concern for the reception of the gospel and the benefit of others, these rhetorical questions were probably designed to stress the undesirability of any behavior that would lead others to malign Christian teaching or practice. Those who are unnecessarily drawn to denigrate Christian teaching or practice are not experiencing the same reaction which was promoted by Paul's gospel-centered approach of adapting to the needs of those he sought to reach. If the other person's sense of moral judgment convinces them that the Christian is acting in a hypocritical or unethical manner and leads them to judge the Christian and think less of the gospel and its effects, the Christian is not promoting the gospel but hindering its success. Verses 24, 32–33 clarify (along with 8:9–13; 9:19–23) that it is the primacy of the gospel as a guide to dealing with difficult moral issues that governs Paul's thinking on this issue.

10:31 Paul concludes his discussion of idol food strongly in 10:31–11:1, using the inferential conjunction "so" or "therefore" at the start of v. 31 and employing three imperatives in these four verses. In these verses he returns to the biblical motif of maintaining a good reputation before outsiders for the dual (negative and positive) motives of protecting the honor of God's name and winning over the heathen (vv. 31–33): *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."* Such an unselfish approach to life is to be expected of anyone who follows the example of Christ. The Suffering Servant is described in Isaiah 53:11–12 LXX as one who gave himself for the good of "many."301

Paul begins his conclusion by postulating three alternatives, or rather two alternatives followed by a universalizing catchall phrase. Each of the three alternatives is linguistically marked by the term "whether": (literally) "whether you eat, whether you drink, whether you do something [else], do everything for the glory of God."303 It has sometimes been suggested that Paul's point is that even in the most mundane aspects of life (such as eating and drinking) we should concern ourselves above all with the glory of God. Of course that is true, but Paul does not mention eating and drinking primarily because they are mundane activities but because those activities have been the focus of his discussion since the beginning of chapter 8 and because they were particularly dangerous contexts, in Paul's world, for potential entanglement with idolatrous activities. The point is that when the Corinthians think about issues related to food and drink (or any other issue), their overriding concern should not be with the exercise of their own rights and freedom or desires but with the potential implications for God's honor and glory. If their practice leads others to judge them unfavorably or to denigrate them and the Christian faith (vv. 29–30), God's glory has not been well served. God's glory is served by the progress of the gospel.

Karl Barth correctly recognized that this verse "is the goal of this section." Paul's exhortation to do everything (including eating and drinking) to God's glory as he concludes his section on idol food parallels the exhortation to glorify God with our bodies in the conclusion to his section on sexual immorality (cf. 6:20). God is to be glorified in the world through his people. Sexual immorality (chs. 5–6) and idolatry (chs. 8–10) are the antithesis to the glorification of God. They are to be countered by the manifestation of Christian sexual purity (ch. 7) and God-honoring worship (chs. 11–14) which reflect true wisdom (cf. chs. 1–4) as we await the return of the resurrected Son of God (ch. 15). Any behavior that detracts from God's glory is to be rejected in favor of ones that promote it.

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10:32 Part of what glorifying God entails in this context is the avoidance of offense to others. The first clause of this verse is often translated "Give no offense" (e.g., ESV, NRSV, NASB, NET, NLT), and that is in keeping with the recommendation of BDAG. As Fee points out, the adjective Paul uses here is "the negative form of the noun that appears in 8:9" as "stumbling block." In our comments on that word we pointed out that Paul uses the metaphor of the stumbling block (as well as stumbling or falling) to describe an obstacle that keeps someone from finding their way to ultimate salvation, to the proper destination of life's journey. The reference to falling in 10:12 reflects the same idea. The TNIV translation, *Do not cause anyone to stumble*, reflects well the relationship to 8:9 and the motif Paul has used elsewhere in the letter. As John Dickson puts it, "Paul's exhortation in v. 32 calls on the Corinthians so to modify their social intercourse that the salvation of insiders and outsiders would in no way be put at jeopardy."
The three-part description of those who are not to be offended, *whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God*, casts the net as widely as possible. *Greeks* here "represents all non-Jewish pagans within the so-called civilized world" and is virtually synonymous with "Gentiles." In Jewish and Christian writings the dualism reflected in "Jews and Greeks/Gentiles" is usually sufficient to refer to all peoples. Paul's addition of *the church of God* reflects the transformation effected by Christ in the lives of Jews and Greeks/Gentiles that makes them something different from what they were previously. Even if Gentiles become true or spiritual Jews or part of true/spiritual Israel, in Christ neither they nor converted Jews can simply still fall under the category of *Jews*. Jews and Greeks may still serve to refer to all nonbelievers. But those who believe in Christ are *the church of God*, his eschatological people (cf. the comments on 1:2). Paul's language points "to a discontinuity, as if to imply that 'the people of God' are partly redefined, although not in exclusivist terms since their roots and basis of divine promise and covenant remain in continuity with Israel's history." That Paul intends to include all people under the categories of Jews, Greeks and *church of God* is verified in the following verse where Paul speaks of his attempt to please "everyone." Paul stressed this same theme in 9:19–22, where he discussed his approach to ministering to Jews, those under the law, those not under the law and the weak. There he finished up, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some," which is clearly parallel to the following verse (10:33).

The context suggests how Paul might imagine the Corinthians could cause members of these different groups to stumble. Dickson helpfully comments: "The reference to Jews probably reflects an awareness on the part of Paul of a large Jewish community in Corinth which could easily have taken offence at the 'liberal' social habits of the 'knowledgeable' in the Corinthian church. Of course, Paul does not think that attendance at pagan banquets will lead Jews into idolatry. His point is probably that such behaviour might give Jews of the city another reason (cf. 1:23) to denounce the church and so to avoid Christians and Christian tradition." That would result in stumbling and missing out on the saving power of the gospel. The stumbling of the Greeks could easily come about if some Corinthians were to eat food in such a way that could be interpreted as "a tacit affirmation of idolatrous beliefs thereby strengthening the 'Greeks' in a form of 'piety' destined for destruction." As he points out, this scenario is "analogous to that described in 8:7–13 in relation to believers" and therefore may also explain how those who are identified as *the church of God* could be led to stumble if the Corinthians are not more careful. A "weaker brother who 'up until now' had been accustomed to idols" could be led back into idolatry, which would be a stumbling block and result in their destruction "since idolatry stands under the eschatological judgement of God."

10:33 Verse 33 picks up the theme of 9:22, where Paul said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." Here he says that the Corinthians must be careful not to cause anyone to stumble (v. 32), even *as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved* (v. 33). So the Corinthians are to follow Paul's example, which is briefly summarized here since Paul had more fully described it for them in 9:19–23. In the comments on those verses it was pointed out that while Paul emphasizes elsewhere that he is committed to pleasing God rather than humans (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4), there and in this passage he highlights his commitment to working in such a way as to positively impress those among whom he lives and works. His love for and commitment to God keep him from doing anything inappropriate merely to please humans. It is that same love for God and commitment to him and the

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gospel that led him to adapt his life and ministry to the needs and context of those among whom he lives and ministers in order to bring them into life-transforming contact with the gospel message God has entrusted to him.

11:1 This verse clearly belongs to the preceding discussion, despite its unfortunate separation by the later division of the letter into chapters. As the last verse of this passage, it clarifies that Paul himself is following and passing on to the Corinthians the example set by Christ himself: *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* That Paul had Christ's example in mind may have been telegraphed by his reference in v. 33 to "the good of many" since Isaiah 53:11–12 LXX describes the Suffering Servant as the righteous one "who serves many well"314 and "who bore the sins of many." Paul referred to the example of Christ that he has in mind in 8:11, where he pointed out that Christ died for the weak, and the reference to Christ's blood and body in 10:16 points in the same direction. It is evoked again in Paul's references to Christ's body, blood, and death in his discussion of the Lord's Supper in 11:24–26, and in 15:3 the fact that "Christ died for our sins" is affirmed to be at the heart of the gospel message, the gospel message for the advance of which Paul said he was willing to sacrifice anything in 9:23. Christ's example of putting the needs of others before his own freedom or rights, and especially of doing whatever is necessary to secure their salvation (see again the preceding verse), was clearly the motivating force behind Paul's own approach to ministry as he has described it to the Corinthians and promoted it as a model for them to follow.

Paul's call to the imitation of his example as he follows that of Christ is not about the reinforcement of his own power and imposing an ideology of "sameness," as some have suggested, but, as Andrew Clarke has shown, "[t]he substance of this imitation is presented in the preceding verse, namely that they are not to seek their own good, but the good of many."317 His review of Paul's use of the motif of imitation shows a consistent pattern in which "the object of imitation is not exclusively Paul, but is always ultimately Christ."

As suggested in the introduction to 8:1–11:1, the relationship between the two great commandments to love God and neighbor (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18), though not cited in this book, may be seen to underwrite Paul's argument throughout this section and particularly this final section. In Paul's view, our love for God must be reflected in our love for others. That perspective is reflected in the relationship between v. 31 and vv. 32–33, where doing "all for the glory of God" (v. 31) entails doing what it takes to keep others from stumbling unnecessarily (v. 32) and seeking their good and salvation (v. 33). That is the model Paul set for the Corinthians and which Christ set for Paul through the giving of his very life (11:1).[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3] 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), 484–499.