**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems – #31**

**Freedom in the Lord and Discernment of Conscience**

**1 Corinthians 10:23-33**

**1 Corinthians 10**

***23*** *“All things are permissible,” but not all are beneficial. “All things are permissible,” but not all edify.* ***24*** *None should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor.*

***25*** *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, without raising a question in conscience.* ***26*** *“For the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.”*

***27*** *If some unbeliever invites you (to dinner) and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising a question in conscience.* ***28*** *But if someone says to you, “This is sacrificial meat,” do not eat it for the sake of the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience.* ***29*** *I mean, not your conscience, but the other’s. For why should my freedom be determined by someone else’s conscience?* ***30*** *If I partake with thanks (to God), why am I reviled for what I give thanks?*

***31*** *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.* ***32*** *Avoid giving offense, whether to Jews or Greeks or the church of God,* ***33*** *even as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own good but that of the many that they may be saved.*

**The Main Subject – Freedom, Abuses and Permission**

We have been discussing the personal freedom to eat or not to eat idol meat and other abuses of the Lord’s table (10:1-22). Paul here confronts what looks like a common saying, “All things are permissible,” which he has already quoted in 6:12. His commentary moves on to deal with a wider scale, the building up of the community.

This is no longer eating in a temple but the eating at home of meat bought in a marketplace (10:23-26) or a meal of a guest invited to a private dinner (10:27-31). It seems that Paul himself had eaten such meat, because he speaks of being “reviled” for he gives thanks for such food that comes from a pagan place (10:29). Paul stresses rather the edification of the community as a whole (10:23; recall 8:1, 10), while advising not to have misgivings about eating at home meat bought in a market or consuming meat at a dinner to which one is invited by a heathen friend.

In such a private setting, however, are six imperatives for social life:

1. Let no one seek his own advantage (verse 24)
2. Eat what is sold in the market (verse 25)
3. Eat what is offered to you as a guest (verse 27)
4. But do not eat sacrificial meat (verse 28)
5. Do all for the glory of God (verse 31)
6. Avoid creating offense to anyone (verse 32)

We can add 1 Corinthians 11:1 to these six imperatives that is so important in the life of Paul that it can be called the Pauline Motto “*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ* (11:1).

**Permission and Discernment**

**VERSE 23 –** *“All things are permissible,” but not all are beneficial. “All things are permissible,” but not all edify.*

“All things are permissible,” here Paul may have added “but not all are beneficial”, and he will make it more waterproof “All things are permissible,” but not all edify. As in 1 Corinthians 6:12, this saying is quoted twice, and in each case Paul adds a restrictive comment to define where he stands with maximum clarity. Paul’s first comment echoes a common saying from the book of wisdom of Sirach (LXX), “Not everything is good for everyone.” (37:28)

**Note on the Wisdom of Sirach**

“The Book of the All-Virtuous Wisdom of Joshua ben Sira,” commonly called the “Wisdom of Sirach” or simply “Sirach” and also known as “The Book of Ecclesiasticus of Ben Sira,” is a work of ethical teachings from the early 2nd century B.C. (approximately 200-175 B.C.) written by the [Jewish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish) scribe [Shimon ben Yeshua ben Eliezer ben Sira](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shimon_ben_Yeshua_ben_Eliezer_ben_Sira) of [Jerusalem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem). It was translated from Hebrew into Greek by the author's grandson, who added a prologue. The Prologue to the Book of the All-Virtuous Wisdom of Joshua ben Sirach is generally considered the earliest witness to a canon of the books of the prophets, and thus the date of the text as we have it is the subject of intense scrutiny.

This book was part of the Septuagint LXX; the Reformers rejected it because of the lack of the original Hebrew text. But it was known in Hebrew as The "Book of ben Sirach" (**ספר בן סירא**, Sefer ben Siraʼ) because from the Greek translation itself we can tell that it was originally written in [Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language), and was also known in Hebrew as the "Proverbs of ben Sirach" (**משלי בן סירא**, Mišley ben Siraʼ) or the "Wisdom of ben Sirach" (**חכמת בן סירא**, Ḥokhmat ben Siraʼ). The book was not accepted into the [Hebrew Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_Bible) and as a result the original Hebrew text was not preserved in the [Jewish canon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_canon). However, various original Hebrew versions have since been recovered, including fragments recovered within the [Dead Sea Scrolls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Sea_Scrolls) and the [Cairo Genizah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Genizah), the latter of which includes fragments from six separate manuscripts.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul includes a broader vision than that of the book of Sirach. Paul looks for the life of the church and the building up of the Christian community. So he adds two comments:

1. What is “beneficial”

2. That which edifies or builds up the community.

**VERSE 24 –** *No one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor.*

This is the first of the six imperatives; “let each one seek.” In a style like a proverb Paul is speaking to the whole community. A Proverb is a short statement that can stick to the memory and contains a kind of intuitive wisdom that is not debated.

**VERSE 25 –** *Eat whatever is sold in the meat market.*

This is the second imperative. No one , no one should scruple (have misgivings) over the meat that is commonly sold in the markets of the Corinthian forum. It is ***adiaphoron***, an “indifferent” matter of no consequence since it came from the market. The Greek word ***makellon***, market, is known from an inscription of Epidaurus (ca. 400 B.C.), meaning “enclosure” (Inscriptiones Graecae . . . Vol. IV ed. minor [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1929] §102:296, 298)

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Meat offered in sacrifice to pagan gods was sold in the ***makella***, which were often found close to temples. From classical writers such as Plato, we learn that there was other food available such as fish, olives, cheese, vegetables. So it was not only meat, but also other kinds of food that must have been in mind.

**VERSE 25 (cont.) –** *Without raising a question in conscience.*

Literally “examining nothing in conscience.” If there is what seems to be idol meat available in the market, do not ask questions. According to the Mishnah, a Jew is allowed to buy meat in a common market only if the animal had not been slaughtered by a non-Jewish butcher, had not been associated with a pagan cult, and not having a fatal organic illness. Though he is a former Pharisee, Paul is speaking as no longer a Jew.

**Note on the Mishnah**

The Mishnah from the ([Hebrew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_%28language%29): **משנה**, "repetition", from the verb shanah **שנה**, or "to study and review", also "secondary" (derived from the adjective shani **שני**) is the first major written [redaction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redaction) of the Jewish [oral traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_tradition) called the "[Oral Torah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_Torah)." It is also the first major work of [Rabbinic literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbinic_literature).

The Mishna was redacted circa 200-220 CE by [Rabbi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabbi) [Yehudah haNasi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yehudah_haNasi) when the Jews and the passage of time raised the possibility that the details of the oral traditions dating from [Pharisaic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharisee) times (536 BCE - 70 CE) would be forgotten. *[Editor’s note: “BCE” is an updated academic form of expressing “BC,” while “CE” means “AD.” “CE” stands for Common Era, removing Christ and God from date notations.]*

**VERSE 26 –** *For the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.*

As the basis for “discernment is faith” declared in Psalm 24:1, the words of Psalm 24 are in fact part of a standard Jewish blessing of food (that is, giving thanks). God as Creator of all things has blessed creation and this is the reason for his second imperative. Paul means that even meat that has been offered to an idol, which is now being sold indiscriminately in a market, still belongs to God, who created all, and the meat is part of his gift of food to human beings. (Compare Acts 10:15; 1 Tim 4:4; Mark 7:1-8, 19).

**VERSE 27 –** *If some unbeliever invites you (to dinner) and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising a question in conscience*.

The third imperative is practical but, for good reason, not only practical. Christians are free to dine privately with unbelievers in their houses, without fear or doubt. The pronoun “you” is plural; so, Paul is addressing the Corinthian community. Many Corinthian Christians would have had nonbelieving friends who might be invited to dine in their houses, and such dining would not have been a participation in “*the table of demons*” (verse 21), because the setting of the meal is different from a banquet in a temple and a private home, and is not an idol’s temple.

**VERSE 28 –** *But if someone says to you, “This is sacrificial meat,” do not eat it for the sake of the one who informed you.*

In this verse as well as verse 29, Paul presents his fourth imperative. Here, Paul introduces a theoretical case that is the opposite of verse 27; the meat is now called “something offered or sacrificed to a deity.”

If “someone,” whoever that may be, offers to a Christian fellow guest at a dinner, meat that has been dedicated to a god and that this meat is regarded as a sacrifice and thus is “sacred,” Paul says, “Do not eat it,” a negative plural addressed to the Corinthian community because it is here a sharing in honoring a god with a heathen.

**VERSE 29 –** *I mean, not your conscience, but the other’s.*

Literally “I mean not one’s own conscience, but that of the other (person),” that is, the conscience of the fellow guest. A pagan’s conscience presumably would not be offended by a Christian eating idol meat or something, but it is the commitment to the sacred that will disturb anyone who may fear contamination by eating what has a contact with a foreign god.

**Freedom Does Not Seek Confirmation**

**VERSE 29 (cont.) –** *For why should my freedom be determined by someone else’s conscience?*

In a private meal served even by an unbeliever, there is no reason for the Christian guest not to eat what is served to him or her, for there is no reason to question it “in conscience.” Moreover, verse 30 follows logically on this. In verse 31, Paul resumes the second person plural imperative. He introduces this question in verse 29b with ***hinatí*** (in many mss *[mss = manuscripts]* written as two words), which stands for ***hina tí gen tai***, “for what reason does it happen (that)?” (BDF §12.3; §299.4), hence, “to what end, why?” In effect, the question agrees with the position of those who possess knowledge in chapter 8 and asserts the freedom of the individual conscience.

The second part of this verse (29) and the next verse (30) have been much debated, being notoriously difficult to interpret. For instance, (1) for Lietzmann (1 Cor, 52), they are an expostulation *[description]* of the so-called strong Christian, in diatribe-like *[attacking, argumentative]* style, but they are not directly answered; Paul continues in his own way with 10:31-11:1. But how does one know that the verses are a diatribe-like expostulation? There is no dialogue in the text. (2) Tomson (Paul, 213–16) claims that ***syneid≤sis*** should be understood as “intention,” analogous to the rabbinic use of Hebrew ***da‹at***, and hence Paul’s words would mean, “the pagan’s intention toward idolatry prohibits the Christian’s eating.” But that interpretation hardly corresponds to Paul’s usual use of ***syneid≤sis***. (3) The best solution is to take verses 29b-30 as commentary on verse 27 (so RSV; Bruce, 1 Cor, 100–101; Hays, 1 Cor, 177–78; Garland, 1 Cor, 499).

**VERSE 30 –** *If I partake with thanks (to God), why am I reviled for what I give thanks?* I.e., when a Christian says grace before a meal (perhaps silently when invited by a un- believing host), how can he or she thank God for something that is evil or wrong, and so he or she would have to be faulted for consumption of such food? Paul will not allow “someone else’s conscience” to be a judge of him or restrict his freedom or rights, even though he might restrain that freedom himself, as he has already done in 8:13. This stance provides the basis for what he will assert in vv. 31-32. Cf. Rom 14:6b (also 1 Tim 4:3-4).

**VERSE 31 –** *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.*

This is Paul’s fifth imperative. All human activity should be carried out “for the glory of God,” i.e., as a form of praise of God, and not motivated by food laws or the satisfaction of one’s natural appetite, or even by the assertion of one’s personal liberty.

Our human conduct is doxological *[praising]* for this brings joy to us and keeps our communion with God, (see 2 Cor 1:20; 4:15; Rom 15:7; Phil 1:11; 2:11; cf. Rom 11:36)

**The Church of God**

**VERSE 32 –** *Avoid giving offense, whether to Jews or Greeks or the church of God.*

This sixth imperative is only a simple application of the principle just stated in verse 31. Paul does not specify what the offense might be. In the days of Paul humanity was divided into two groups: Jews and Gentiles. Christians were in the middle and they were singled out, the first two of which are “outsiders” (1 Cor 5:12), described by the pair, “Jews or Greeks,” a combination that appears elsewhere (1:22, 24; 12:13; Gal 3:28; Rom 1:16; 2:9–10). The Church has to witness to both of them.

Here we encounter for the first time that unique name, “the church of God.” Unique because it is created and will continue to exist as God’s work.

**VERSE 33 –** *Even as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own good but that of the many that they may be saved.*

Paul does not mean that he is seeking favor, his cry has to be taken into account, “*For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the slave of Christ.*”(Gal 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4) Paul has been seeking to render service to everyone without deference, either to himself or any other individual. The goal in his preaching is salvation of all, of which he has already spoken in (1:18, 21; 9:22).

**The Roots of our Freedom**

**A Letter from Philemon**

Brother George

Christ is risen to give us eternal life! May the joy of his resurrection penetrate your being and gives you his peace.

We have not been created to please others according to what the world and the society is demanding from us, that is, according to the standard of this world which does not know our Savior nor understand his redeeming love.

St. Paul says that the “*world has been crucified to him and he to the world*.” It took me a long time to understand this simple but hard saying. The Lord opened my heart to see that the crucified world is the dead world that died with Jesus on the cross but was not risen for it was buried in the grave with Jesus. It is our humanity that Jesus took from us, the natural one that was put to death by the Romans and the Jews and it died. With this humanity died all that we know – justice – for Jesus was not guilty but was killed as a criminal and as an evil man and was hanged with two thieves. [What also died] was the Law of the Romans, for it failed. Also the Law of the Jews died, because it delivered the holy one to death. And with Jesus died also his ethnic origin. What was raised is the New and the Last Adam. When Paul saw all that he counted, all that he gained as “rubbish” (Phil 3:8). The day I received this light, I was illuminated and overjoyed [during the] days that the great Lent passed and suddenly we were at the Holy Week.

The world is dead to me; it can’t give me life, and it will enslave me. But now that I am “crucified to the world” the world can’t claim anything or any “right” or power over me.

Glory to our Beloved Jesus for now I have discovered the roots of our freedom.

Let us rejoice in this.

Pray for me

No date

Easter of 1966

**Freedom and Love**

**Letter from Philemon**

Brother George,

Peace and joy in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Why do you ask about freedom? Christ is our freedom. This we have to discover according to our mature love. Freedom is hidden in love and those who exercise love and live the love of Christ discover freedom in this unique love. What is agreeable to some may be hard for others, but there is freedom for both in Christ Jesus our Beloved.

My brother, there is our limited love and there is that very love that has received the power of the Holy Spirit and is transfigured to the Greater Love of Jesus that looks for the eternal, and sticks to the eternal and leaves freely all for the sake of Jesus.

There is a lesser love that one that seeks to do the commandments and to do them literally with a mind and a will of a slave, not that of the free child who rejoices in the commandments as a way of life. If you feel or think that the commandments restrict your freedom then be sure that your love is immature, and that your love for freedom is greater than your love for Jesus. I know that you may ask, What shall I do? Do nothing but let go of loving freedom for it is the mask that hides the root of evil that you want to live without the Lord and that you don’t love to share your life with our Beloved Jesus.

In the school of Divine Love, there is True Freedom and those who are disciplined by His love learn His Freedom.

Pray for me,

Philemon

No date

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