

What Does the OT Have To Do with Christian Living?

1 Corinthians 10¹⁶

Illustration of viewing *The Night Watch* at the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam. The first impression is this is a huge painting. At a certain distance, you were just looking at a painting. Or you could walk up very close and see the jewels on the sword hilts or laces on the boot cuffs. But at just the right distance, the picture seemed to come alive. You could almost sense the figures ready to move.

That's the challenge in coming to this text. From a distance it is a huge text. At close inspection, there are details that beg for investigation. But hopefully, we find just the right place to make it come alive. We'll save jewels and boot laces for another time.

At first, verses 1-13 and possibly to verse 22 seem to be a parenthesis. But the opening word construction *for* requires us to see an underlying connection to chapter 9 and a unity in the whole chapter.

In chapter 8, Paul **instructs** the giving up of ones liberty in view of edification. There is a warning to the experienced believers to an anchoring of their knowledge in love.

In chapter 9, Paul **illustrates** the giving up of ones liberty in view of evangelism. There is a warning to the experienced believers to an acceptance of diversity in the means of ministry.

In chapter 10, Paul **implements** the exercise of ones liberty in view of experience. There is a warning to the experienced believers to an awareness that their liberty may lead to license.

So watch carefully how Paul develops this implementation in liberty.

The Pattern of Failure to be Avoided

(v.1-13)

The apostle begins by taking us back into the Old Testament to warn us that identifying with God's people and participating in spiritual privilege do not guarantee individual purity.

¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

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Spiritual Privileges of God's People**(v.1-4)**

These were the grand spiritual privileges that the Israelites experienced. They were delivered from their slavery and their enemies by the presence of God with them and identified with Moses by passing through the sea. They participated in Christ by drinking the water and eating the manna with its spiritual, topological significance. Paul is seeing the Old Testament as salvation history and interpreting it in the light of the church's ordinances.

Sobering Problem for God's People**(v.5)**

If this was their privilege, why are their bodies scattered across the wilderness? In spite of all that God had done for them in visible demonstrations of His presence, provision and power, He was not pleased with them.

Sinful Practice of God's People**(v.6-11)**

Paul says that the recorded history of Israel is written for us to observe and learn not to imitate their sinful desires and actions. He draws on several incidents all of which were true in Corinth. The church there was guilty of the same sins that Israel had committed.

Idolatry**(v.7)**

Drawn from Exodus 32:6 and exposed in 1 Corinthians 8...

Immorality**(v.8)**

Drawn from Numbers 25 and exposed in 1 Corinthians 6...

Testing**(v.9)**

Drawn from Numbers 21 and exposed in 1 Corinthians 10:22...

Grumbling**(v.10)**

Drawn from Numbers 16 and exposed in 2 Corinthians 12...

Verse 11 reminds us forcibly that the Old Testament is profitable in powerful ways for the New Covenant believer. Israel sinned under Law and that was bad. It is even worse to sin under grace in this final age of redemptive history.

Significant Provision for God's People**(v.11-13)**

What does it mean for us that God's people experiencing spiritual privilege can be under God's displeasure because of their sinful practice?

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Warning against Spiritual Pride**(v.12)**

It is just when we think that we are most secure and safe that we standing on the slipperiest ground.

Encouraging for Spiritual Purity**(v.13)**

This is a statement of the facts.

No temptation is ever too strong for the believer.

Every temptation may be escaped and endured by the believer.

So here it is. The experienced believer must understand that his very experience of spiritual privileges does not make him immune to temptation. All believers must take heart in their temptation for there is a way to avoid sin.

So, now what? How does this relate to their liberty? Well, the exercise of their liberty was tempting some to commit idolatry.

The Prohibition of Dining to be Accepted

(v.14-22)

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

The command to flee from idolatry is the hinge that connects the prior section to what will follow. In verses 1-13, Paul has made an argument that the Old Testament is not only profitable and necessary for us as Christians.

The Old Testament is profitable when we understand how it points us to Christ. This is fundamental to our handling of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is profitable when we understand how the narratives and people of the Old Testament are types and pictures of the people of God, including us as New Covenant believers.

The Old Testament is profitable when the New Testament commands illuminate the faith, obedience, disbelief and disobedience of the Old Testament people. This results in the “do not be like them...” The New Testament gives us the commands. The Old Testament gives us illustrations of the choices, consequences, chastening, condemnation and correction entailed in those commands.

The Old Testament is profitable when we use its principles, patterns, and pictures to inform our wisdom decisions.

Now, Paul has laid out four imperatives illustrated by Israel’s past. He has pointed to Christ as the Old Testament reality of the New Testament ordinances. He has warned them of idolatry (v.7), immorality (v.8), testing God (v.9), and grumbling (v.10). Now he is going to turn from confronting them about their arrogant turning their liberty into a right to confronting them about their wrong understanding of the issue.

Paul in chapter 8 did not address the issue of eating meat offered to idols. He raised the subject but in order to confront them about their abuse of their liberty to harm other believers and the ministry of the church. He seems to be agreeing with their view. But now, it becomes quite evident that those who thought it was ok, are really not thinking through the Bible’s commands nor its concerns very well. So he returns to the issue and now applies these commands to their question.

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Paul carefully divides the question they have written about into two parts. Can we buy and eat meat sacrificed to idols which is being sold in the temple market? Can we go to meals served at the pagan temple? These verses are dealing with the second question: is it sin to go to the pagan temple for a meal? Now we really don’t care about this question much today.

But we need to observe Paul's method of reflecting on the circumstances and the Scripture as he makes application.

Precept - The Sin They Are Confronted With **(v.14)**

The experienced believers, exercising their liberty to eat meat sacrificed in the pagan temples, were going to be tempted to commit idolatry. Notice the command is to flee, run away from, exit from idolatry.

Process - The Situation They Are Tempted In **(v.15-20)**

This can appear to be a very complicated argument. Let us try to follow it, not in the form that Paul presents it, but in a form more accessible to us.

When we partake of the cup and the bread in communion we are sharing or fellowshiping in a spiritual way with Christ.

When the Israelite ate the sacrifices they brought to the Temple, they were sharing or fellowshiping God at the altar.

So is what is offered to idols and the idol itself nothing? No, what the church wrote him in 1 Corinthians 8 is wrong. He is not implying agreement with them.

So consider Deuteronomy 32:15-18.

¹⁵ "But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. ¹⁶ They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. ¹⁷ They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. ¹⁸ You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

What the Israelite sacrificed [to idols], they were really sacrificing and therefore fellowshiping with demons, not God.⁴

They were not to open themselves to sharing in or fellowshiping with demons.

You cannot take the Lord's Table and eat at the idol's table.

So, a believer cannot partake of the Lord's Table and the idol's table without exposing himself to danger and provoking the Lord.

Paul is in sense reflecting on the very examples he has given in verses 6-10 and anticipating his discussion of the seriousness of the Lord's Table in Chapter 11.

Point - The Solution to Their Dilemma **(v.21-22)**

²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

The conclusion then is simply that a believer was faced with a choice: fellowship with God in Communion or fellowship with demons by dining at the temple's table. It was choice between God and Satan. That is why this section starts with the injunction: flee idolatry.

Paul opened this chapter by reminding us that, like Israel, we have a covenant union with God. The Lord's Table is an expression of that covenant union. It is the feast of the New Covenant. It is participated in by those who are in the covenant. Eating in the pagan temple at a pagan feast is celebrating the idol's deity and deeds. But God makes an exclusive claim on His Deity and on His people. We must not act as though worshipping multiple gods is

ok or as through there are many ways to God. The Bible totally rejects such a notion. And that the Christian must not participate in pagan rituals, including eating at the pagan table, is a clear implication and imperative. Therefore, the Corinthian believers were expected to have arrived at the right decision. But they hadn't. Eating the cheap meat at home was fine. Eating at the pagan ritual was not.

There are so many applications of this today. Loved ones, you cannot participate in any activity where idolatry or the occult is involved. This will mean no astrology, no occult games, no D&D style games, no music or concerts where the text of the words worships or affirms Satan or Satanic themes, no involvement in oriental or new age mystical techniques of meditation, relaxation, or exercise. These are clearly ways in which the modern Christian can "dine at the pagan table fellowshiping with demons."

So the careful thought and application of a Biblical principle has dealt with one side of the question. Now, how do we deal with the other issues of liberty which do not involve us in spiritual danger and provocation of the Lord?

The Practice of Liberty to be Adopted (v.23-11:1)

In the light of all that has gone before how do we implement this in our daily practice. Since we are not, in our culture, directly affected by the particular problem here, I want to glean through this as a summary of the principles to guide us through our own practice of Christian liberty.

²³ "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." ²⁷ If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— ²⁹ I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

Correction of Their Attitude (v.23-24)

Response to Their Statement (v.23)

"Everything is permissible", however:

Profitable - self directed to my own personal growth and edification.

Edifying - others directed to build up and encourage others/

Reason for His Tests (v.24)

This phrase is one which Paul brings to the Christian's attention often. Our primary concern is the good of others, not our own good. See also Romans 15:2 and Philippians 2:4.

Circumstances of Their Application

General Rule - Broadest Application (v.25-26)

This statement is to cover situations in the market place. It may be aimed particularly at Jewish believers.

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.”

Statement of the principle (v.25).

Don’t make an issue about the meat sold in the market, particularly on the issue of conscience.

Support for the principle (v.26)

See also Psalm 24:1; 50:12; 1 Tim. 4:4

So we have a responsibility to retrain your conscience to line up with the Scripture. We may not simply assert the narrowness of our conscience *as a spiritual norm for me*. Those who are weak, those who have narrow restrictions are to retrain their consciences and thus become strong in faith.

Guiding Exception - Particular Application (v.27-30)

This paragraph covers the situation where a believer is in the home of an unbeliever and someone points out that the food is sacrificed meat. Do we then, as Christians, simply assert that we are free? No, Paul says in this situation we are not to eat, even if we are giving up our liberty for the sake of the conscience of another (possibly for the sake of another [kind of, that is unconverted] conscience.)

Two questions which arise: one pointing to what he has just said and one pointing to what he is going to say.

Why should I be judged by another’s conscience?

Why should I be slandered when I am thankful for the food and have given thanks for it?

The answer is in the following.

The Principles of Liberty Affirmed (v.31-11:1)

The whole teaching on liberty can be wrapped up in these concluding principles.

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

The Objective of Glory to God (v.31)

Do everything you do so as to reflect the worth and value of God in Christ. No matter what you do, govern your behavior guided so that God can and does receive glory.

The Goal of Offense to None (v.32)

Too many commentators make too much of this tri-fold distinction laying it down as a comprehensive and conclusive division of all people. That is not his point in the context at all. There were Jews and Gentiles with their own cultural and ethnic heritage which they were to be sensitive to. Therefore, in our liberty, we must be aware of the impact on the cultural and ethnic diversity both in and outside the church.

The Effort of Profit to the Lost**(v.33)**

Evangelism has a large part in shaping what we do and do not do. If we are merely trying to please ourselves, we will lose our evangelistic fervor and effectiveness.

The Identification of Models to Emulate**(11:1)**

The example of Christ is mediated through men whose lives shape and mold us as we pattern ourselves after their following of Christ, the King.

Reflect and Respond

We must be very careful that our liberty does not become sin. Spiritual privilege is no guarantee of spiritual purity.

Discerning where liberty ends and license begins requires deep reflection on the Scripture and careful consideration of our culture.

All assertions of liberty must be grounded in the Scripture. Notice how often, when stating their liberty, he connects it to particular texts.

Particular applications of principles in the Scripture give us guidelines on how we are to apply those same principles in our situations.

In all areas of liberty we must ask the following questions:

- ☞ Am I sufficiently aware of the pitfalls?
- ☞ Is it profitable to me?
- ☞ Is it edifying to others?
- ☞ Does it glorify God?
- ☞ Is it offensive within my cultural milieu?
- ☞ Does it build or burn bridges in evangelism?
- ☞ Does it follow Christ-like models?

May God be pleased to give us such a spirit of grace in our liberty that we will exalt God, edify one another and evangelize the lost.

⁴ Possibly, "When a pagan eats the sacrifices at table in the temple he is sharing in or fellowshiping with demons, not God."