

# Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 10:14-33

## Special Emphasis on “Applications of Church Fellowship” and “What Makes an Adiaphoron a Confessional Matter”

[Presented at the Winnebago Pastoral Conference in Markesan, WI, February 3, 1986]

*by Timothy Mueller*

### Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 10:14-33

In verses 1-13 of chapter ten of 1 Corinthians Paul gave the Corinthians examples, from the history of Israel, how disastrous it had been for Israel to turn from God by falling into idolatry. Many of the Israelites perished because they had turned from the one true God. These examples are to be solemn warnings to Christians not to give way to idolatry as the Israelites did. In the following verses, Paul now continues with the subject of idolatry by warning the Corinthians to stay clear of the idol feasts that were held in Corinth because participation in them was an act of idolatry.

### Part One – 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

#### 1 Corinthians 10:14-17

Literal: 14) Wherefore, my beloved, continue to flee from idolatry.

15) I speak as to intelligent ones; you, yourselves, judge what I say.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?

Because there is one bread, we, the many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread

Verse Fourteen:

Greek: Διόπερ, ἀγαπητοί μου, φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας.

KJV: Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

NIV: Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

Literal: Wherefore, my beloved, continue to flee from idolatry.

Having given the Corinthians examples from the history of Old Testament Israel where the Israelites turned from God and committed idolatry, the apostle Paul now draws the fitting conclusion. “Wherefore, my beloved, continue to flee from idolatry.” The address, “my beloved,” certainly is very affectionate and stresses the gravity

of the situation. The present imperative, “continue to flee,” asks for a continuing action. Paul looks for the Corinthians to always and in everything flee from idolatry.

The Old Testament Israelites had committed idolatry by openly worshiping false gods such as Baal. Because of the idolatry that they had committed, the judgment of the Lord came upon them in various ways. Paul does not want the judgment of God to come upon the Corinthians and for this reason he warns them to stay clear of the idolatry that was being practiced by many of the people of Corinth.

Verse Fifteen:

Greek: ὡς φρονίμοις λέγω· κρίνατε ὑμεῖς ὃ φημι.

KJV: I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.

NIV: I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

Literal: I speak as to intelligent ones; you, yourselves, judge what I say.

It seems that the Corinthians made much of their common sense, as they undoubtedly did of their human wisdom and knowledge. Now the apostle Paul looks for the Corinthians to use their common sense in determining if his argument is valid. Even as we many times use our common sense to apply Scriptural principles to given situations, so also now Paul looks for the Corinthians to use their common sense to apply the communion found at the Lord’s Supper and the communion evident among the Old Testament Israelites as they participated in making sacrifices to the open communion demonstrated when one participated in idol feasts.

The aorist, κρίνατε, asks for a definite and final conclusion. The apostle wants the Corinthians to recognize for themselves how idolatrous it is to participate in idol feasts. ὑμεῖς is emphatic, “you, yourselves.”

Verse Sixteen:

Greek: τό ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν;

KJV: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

NIV: Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

Literal: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?

The enlightened Christian will without a doubt answer “yes” to the questions which Paul now asks. The apostle draws the Corinthians to Jesus’ words of institution. Jesus pointed out very clearly by his words that as one drinks of the fruit of the vine at the Lord’s Supper he also partakes of his blood and as one eats of the bread at

the Lord's Supper he also partakes of the body of Christ. Paul emphasizes Jesus' words of institution by pointing out that the cup of blessing, which refers to the fruit of the vine used at the Lord's Supper, is a communion of the blood of Christ and the bread is a communion of the body of Christ.

Paul mentions the sacramental cup first because he intends to elaborate on the bread. The phrase, "the cup of blessing," is an allusion to the third cup of the Passover, which originally bore that name because a blessing was pronounced over it. The apostle points out here that the blessing which was first pronounced by Jesus over the sacramental elements was and is definitely a part of the sacrament. The power of Christ's words of blessing, once spoken when he instituted the Sacrament, extends to all time. In order that the church continues to include this essential point in the sacrament, she uses the words of institution when she consecrates the elements.

Without a doubt Paul is referring here to the real presence found in the Lord's Supper. "Communion," **κοινωνία**, with the genitive of the object denotes actual and real participation. There is then an actual and real participation between the wine and blood and the bread and body at the Lord's Supper. So when one partakes of the wine, one also partakes of the very blood of Christ and when one partakes of the bread, one also partakes of the very body of Christ. In this way the Lord's Supper connects one to Christ and the forgiveness won by him as he gave his body and shed his blood on the cross. The copula, **ἐστίν**, never means represents but points to the fact that as one partakes of the bread and wine at the Lord's table, one also partakes of the body and blood of Christ.

How wonderfully then this communion found at the Lord's Supper can apply to the participating in idol feasts that some of the Corinthians were doing. The Lord's Supper connects the partaker to Christ, so also as one participates in an idol feast, because that feast is for the purpose of worshiping the false idol, one would be connecting himself to the false idol.

Verse Seventeen:

Greek: ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοί ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν.

KJV: For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

NIV: Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Literal: Because there is one bread, we, the many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Paul continues to emphasize the point that those at the Lord's Supper express fellowship when he states the obvious that as all partake of the bread, they express oneness in that spiritually they are all one body connected by Christ's body and blood. We are made one by the one bread and its communion with Christ's body.

## **1 Corinthians 10:18-22**

Literal: 18) See Israel according to flesh. Are not those eating the sacrifices communicants of the altar? What then say I? That what is sacrificed to an idol is anything or that an idol is anything. On the contrary, but what the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. But I

do not want you to be communicants with demons.  
You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons.  
Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Verse Eighteen:

Greek: βλέπετε τὸν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα· οὐχ οἱ ἐσθίοντες τὰς θυσίας κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου εἰσίν;

KJV: Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?

NIV: Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

Literal: See Israel according to flesh. Are not those eating the sacrifices communicants of the altar?

The imperative, “see,” bids the Corinthians to look at the physical nation of Israel as they gather around the great altar of burnt sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem. The question which Paul now asks again looks for the Corinthians to use their sensible judgment.

The analogy is between the eating of the Israelites and the eating of the Christians, each at their altar. An Israelite who would refuse to eat of the sacrifices would be giving the impression that he did not want anything to do with that sacrifice or anything that was connected with it. But the Israelite who did eat of the sacrifice indicated that he was one with anything that the sacrifice included or represented. It was not just a mere eating that was included as one ate of the Israelite sacrifices. When one ate, that one indicated that he was in fellowship with everything that went along with the sacrifice.

Verse Nineteen:

Greek: τί οὖν φημι; ὅτι εἰδωλόθυτόν τί ἐστίν; ἢ ὅτι εἰδωλὸν τί ἐστίν;

KJV: What say I then? That the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is anything?

NIV: Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything or that an idol is anything?

Literal: What then say I? That what is sacrificed to an idol is anything or that an idol is anything.

Paul now seeks to guard against a false deduction that one might make as they follow his line of reasoning. It was not to be inferred from what he said, that he regarded the professed objects of heathen worship as having the same objective existence as the God whom Christians worshipped; or that he considered the heathen feasts as having any special power. The idol was nothing and that which was offered to the idol was nothing (1 Cor 8:4). However, even though the idol and that which was offered to an idol was nothing, the fact still remains that their worship was real idolatry and has a destructive influence on the soul.

Note: Because of homoeoteleuton the words ἢ ὅτι εἰδωλὸν τί ἐστίν were accidentally omitted by some of

the copyists.

Verse Twenty:

Greek: ἀλλ' ὅτι θύουσιν, δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ [θύουσιν], οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι.

KJV: But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

NIV: No. But the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

Literal: On the contrary, but what the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. But I do not want you to be communicants with demons.

We must understand the apostle as saying on the one hand the gods of the heathen are nothing in that they are only figures of stone, wood, etc., yet on the other hand their sacrifices offered to their idols were really offered, intentionally or unintentionally to evil spirits. For all altars, all sacrifices, and all worship that are not intended to serve the true God are thus actually, though not necessarily consciously and intentionally, devoted to these demons. The devil and his followers are the originators of the spiritual darkness of which idolatry is the most terrible evidence.

Therefore all idol sacrifices, whatever the pagan ideas concerning them may be, are really sacrifices unto devils. Dt 32:7; Ps 106:37; 95:5 show that Paul is here in a manner quoting Scripture. As the heathen then sacrifice to their idols, Paul points out that in doing so they actually become communicants with demons or devils. If one expresses this communion with these demons, he in turn shows that he cuts himself off from communion with the one true God.

Verse Twenty-one:

Greek: οὐ δύνασθε ποτήριον κυρίου πίνειν καὶ ποτήριον δαιμονίων· οὐ δύνασθε τραπέζης κυρίου μετέχειν καὶ τραπέζης δαιμονίων.

KJV: Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of the devils.

NIV: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

LITERAL: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons.

The cup of the Lord is that cup which brings us into communion with the Lord, that is the cup at the Lord's table. The cup of demons is that cup which brings one into communion with those demons, that is the cup from

which the guests drank at these sacrificial feasts. The whole service, this feast of the heathen, had a religious character and was entirely dedicated to their idol. The table of the Lord refers to the entire Lord's Supper, at which table those participating are the guests of the Lord. The table of demons refers to the entire sacrificial feast of the heathen, and the guests at that feast were guests of those demons.

What the apostle is pointing out is that there is not merely a contradiction, an inconsistency in one being the guest and friend of Christ and the guest and friend of demons, but that such a thing is impossible. A misguided Christian may attend an idol feast and not immediately lose his Christianity but he cannot continue this wicked, contradicting practice without spiritual ruin to himself. Very adequately then, the apostle answered fully the question of the Corinthians concerning things offered to idols.

Verse Twenty-two:

Greek: ἡ παραζηλοῦμεν τὸν κύριον; μὴ ἰσχυρότεροι αὐτοῦ ἔσμεν;

KJV: Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

NIV: Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Literal: Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Paul here alludes to Dt 32:21, "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities;" Septuagint, "with their idols." As the apostle uses the indicative and the first person, "are we provoking," he emphasizes how terrible and sinful it is to arouse the Lord's jealousy and how one should in any way refrain from doing so. The Corinthians ought not to attend and participate in these feasts, for in doing so they would excite against themselves in the highest measure the displeasure of the Lord. "The Lord" here refers to Christ since it is his Holy Supper that we are talking about. One will not want to arouse the Lord's anger recognizing who the Lord is. For he is the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings and no one is stronger than he.

### **Application**

The object of this lesson is to convince the readers that, if the feast was held in a temple, attendance upon it was an act of idolatry. Participation at the Lord's Supper connects one with Christ and to those who are also participating of the Lord's Supper. So also whoever would eat of the sacrifices given to idols would connect himself with everything involved in that idol worship. By the force of the act we became one with those in whose worship we join. We constitute with them and with the objects of their worship one communion.

When we find those who confess and teach the Gospel, that is the whole Word of God, in its truth and purity we are to express oneness with them in joint expressions of faith. This fellowship is a wonderful blessing from God and ought to be practiced. This principle of the Word of God is expressed in the following statement on church fellowship issued by the WELS:

We may classify these joint expressions of faith in various ways according to the realm of activity in which they occur, e.g., pulpit fellowship, altar fellowship, prayer fellowship,

fellowship in worship, fellowship in church work, in missions, in Christian education, in Christian charity. Yet insofar as they are joint expressions of faith they are all essentially one and the same thing, and are all properly covered by a common designation, namely church fellowship. Church fellowship should therefore be treated as a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation and demonstration of a common faith.

But when we find that someone is not teaching all of God's Word in its truth and purity and does not heed patient admonition, we are to refrain from fellowship, for if we were to fellowship with them, we would surely connect ourselves with their error. According to this portion of Scripture, joining with persistent errorists in expressions of faith would make us one with them and their false doctrine. Therefore our statement on church fellowship reads:

Hence Scripture can give the general admonition "avoid them" when church fellowship is to cease, Ro 16:17. Hence Scripture sees an expression of church fellowship also in giving the right hand of fellowship, Ga 2:9, and in greeting one another with a fraternal kiss, Ro 16:16; and on the other hand it points out that a withholding of church fellowship may also be indicated by not extending a fraternal welcome to errorists and by not bidding them God speed, 2 Jn 10:11.

The principle is clear in Scripture but the application is not always so simple. As we seek to apply the principle however, we will want to do our best to let people know why we have to do what we do. Let us tell them that out of love for our Lord we seek never to compromise God's Word, we seek the good of their souls by pointing out false doctrine to them and we must avoid anything that could destroy our own soul. Sometimes, however, no matter what we do or say, some will perceive us as being conceited and snobbish. If we have not given this impression and if we have sought to teach them the truth of Scripture and the reason why we must separate, then our consciences are not to be burdened.

There is much talk today also concerning "open communion." The idea of some churches is that members from different church bodies who are not in agreement should take the Lord's Supper together. How clearly such an act would go contrary to what God is teaching us today through our study of God's Word. Certainly, even as the early Christians were to stay clear of feasts given for idols, so also we should stay clear of anything that would express our agreement with false doctrine.

As to organists and soloists from the Wisconsin Synod participating in worship services of other church bodies that we are not in fellowship with, I think the answer is clear from this portion of Scripture that we are studying. The organist and soloist certainly are participants in the worship service even as the individual is who is participating from the pew. As a participant in the worship service, the organist or soloist connects himself to everything that is confessed and taught by the church that is conducting the worship service even as the Corinthians connected themselves with all that had to do with the false idols when they ate at the feasts given for them.

To avoid any misunderstanding it must be noted that this same principle must be applied to our participation in a worship service held by a church that teaches partial truth. For Jesus says, "If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Participation in such a service would connect us with the false doctrine confessed and taught by that church no matter how extensive that false doctrine might be. As Paul says, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You

cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons.” False doctrine is inaugurated by the devil and anything that would indicate our agreement with it would have us partaking of the table of demons.

It would be such compromise and confessional confusion for a soloist of another church fellowship to assist in our worship services. Because the soloist or organist has such an integral part in the worship service, a contradiction would be evident if a member from a church teaching false doctrine were to have such a part in our worship services.

Last year I received a flyer from Lutheran World Relief. The flyer was asking for donations. At the very top of the flyer there were four different Lutheran bodies named. The impression was that these four Lutheran bodies were working together to provide aid to the Africans. One of those church bodies listed was the WELS. The other three church bodies listed were ones that we are not in fellowship with. Has our arrangement with Lutheran World Relief changed from a “business” arrangement to a joint expression of faith?

## **Part Two – 1 Corinthians 10:23-33**

### **1 Corinthians 10:23-28**

Literal:           23)       All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.  
24) Let no one seek that of himself, but that of the other.  
25) Eat everything that is sold in a meat market inquiring nothing because of conscience.  
26) For the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness of it.  
But if anyone of the unbelieving invites you, and you wish to go, everything placed before you eat, inquiring nothing because of conscience.  
But if someone say to you, “This is what is sacrificed to an idol,” do not eat because of him that showed it and because of conscience.

Verse Twenty-three:

Greek: Πάντα ἔξεστιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει. πάντα ἔξεστιν, ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ.

KJV: All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

NIV: “Everything is permissible” – but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible” – but not everything is constructive.

Literal:           All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.

The apostle, in the preceding paragraph, proved that eating of the sacrifices offered to idols under circumstances which gave an impression of fellowship was idolatry. He now comes to state the circumstance under which the meat used in such idol feasts might be eaten without scruple. He begins by again stating the general principle of



Christian liberty stated with the same limitations as in chapter 6:12. In this way he acknowledges that all things are lawful for us in matters of adiaphora. In Galatians 5:12 Paul writes, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” By this Paul states the scriptural principle of Christian liberty by reminding us that Christ has set us free from the law. Our lives are to be lived in response to God’s love instead of compelled by the law. The moral law of God, for the child of God, becomes a guide showing the Christian how he can please his Lord.

However, the Corinthians had taken this to mean that they had complete liberty in everything. Already in 6:12 the apostle had told the Corinthians that this Christian liberty is to be guided by God’s moral law. If what they do contradicts God’s moral law, then they are abusing their Christian liberty. Now in the field of adiaphora the Corinthians had again abused their Christian liberty by thinking that in such things lying in the middle they could do whatever they please with no regard for anyone or anything. Again they had expressed this belief in the phrase, “All things are lawful.” Paul uses the words of the Corinthians as he describes the principle of Christian liberty but he reminds the Corinthians that love for another naturally places limitations on that liberty. For not all things are spiritually “profitable” and not all things spiritually “build up.” For it is absurd to insist on doing things just because they are lawful when these things bring no benefit, when these things do not build up and further the Christian life but rather spiritually hurt, harm, damage and destroy the soul of others.

Verse Twenty-four:

Greek: Μηδεὶς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ζητεῖτω ἀλλ’ τὸ τοῦ ἑτέρου.

KJV: Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.

NIV: Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Literal: Let no one seek that of himself, but that of the other.

When applying Christian liberty in any situation, we must always keep in mind the welfare of others. Self, in other words, is not to be the object of our actions. The principle of Christian liberty must include the welfare of others as Paul points out. It excludes all selfish regard which cares nothing for the interest of other people.

Verse Twenty-five:

Greek: Πᾶν τὸ ἐν μακέλλῳ πωλούμενον ἐσθίετε μηδὲν ἀνακρίνοντες διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν,

KJV: Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:

NIV: Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,

Literal: Eat everything that is sold in a meat market inquiring nothing because of conscience.

A μακέλλῳ is a Latin word which passed into the Greek, and means a meat market. Such a meat market was an ordinary, general meat market where meat from all different origins might be sold. Paul points out that the meat, sacrificed to an idol, when exposed for public sale in the market, lost its character as a sacrifice and might be eaten. “Inquiring nothing because of conscience,” means that because the meat is not connected with idol

worship, the conscience is to be left out of the matter entirely. In such a case, Paul states, that it is a mistake to inquire too carefully for reasons of conscience.

Verse Twenty-six:

Greek: τοῦ κυρίου γὰρ ἡ γῆ καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς.

KJV: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

NIV: for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

Literal: For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it.

By quoting Ps 24:1, Paul gives the reason why the conscience is to be kept out of it in such a situation. "Fullness" refers to everything by which the earth is filled; all the fruits and animals with which it is replenished; which were created by God and therefore good. When not connected with idol worship the Corinthians were to remember that the animal was created by God and was created by God for the benefit of mankind. Buying food for our own table is an entirely different thing from dining at a feast that is given in honor of some idol.

Verse Twenty-seven:

Greek: Εἴ τις καλεῖ ὑμᾶς τῶν ἀπίστων καὶ θέλετε πορεύεσθαι, πᾶν τὸ παρατιθέμενον ὑμῖν ἐσθίετε μηδὲν ἀνακρίνοντες διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν

KJV: If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof:

NIV: If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

Literal: But if anyone of the unbelieving invites you, and you wish to go, everything placed before you eat, inquiring nothing because of conscience.

Paul has told the Corinthians to have no scruples as far as buying meat from the meat market. The same rule of conduct applies in this case. Relatives and friends of Christians who are themselves still unbelievers may invite these Christians in friendly fashion. The Christian is to eat everything without making investigation as to its origin. As the sacrifices lost their religious character when sold in the market, so also at any private table they were to be regarded not as sacrifices, but as ordinary food, and might be eaten without scruple.

Verse Twenty-eight:

Greek: ἂν δέ τις ὑμῖν εἴπῃ, Τοῦτο ἱερόθυτόν ἐστιν, μὴ ἐσθίετε δι' ἐκεῖνον τὸν μηνύσαντα καὶ τὴν συνείδησιν

KJV: But if any man say unto you. This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:

NIV: But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience" sake –

Literal: But if someone say to you, "This is what is sacrificed to an idol," do not eat because of him that showed it and because of conscience.

The Textus Receptus, following a few later uncials and most minuscules, adds, "for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." That this is a copyist's mistake derived from verse 26 is clear from the decisive evidence supporting the shorter text and the fact that the words seem to be entirely out of place. In verse 26 they assign the reason why the Corinthians might eat without scruple whatever was sold in the market. But here they seem to have no connection with what precedes.

Paul now gives an example as to when the liberty of the Christian is to be restricted out of love and concern for the weak Christian. The weak Christian is first one who has been received by God. He is "weak in faith" because he does not have sufficient knowledge and understanding with regard to Christian liberty and indifferent matters. It may actually have become a matter of grief and a stumbling block to him to see others make use of their Christian liberty (Ro 14:15; 1 Cor 8:9). If in this state of doubt the weak Christian were to follow the example of the strong brother, the brother who exercises his Christian liberty, he actually would provoke upon himself the condemnation of his own conscience and risk eternal damnation. For Scripture tells us that anyone who goes against his conscience, even if his conscience is in error, is sinning.

If at such a meal a weak brother mentions that some or all of the meat included in that meal was used in a sacrifice to an idol, then for the sake of the conscience of the weak brother and for his eternal welfare, the one knowledgeable in the matter of Christian liberty is to refrain from eating that meat. The liberty of the strong Christian lies in the fact that he may or may not eat. To choose blindly and carelessly where one can choose intelligently and lovingly is to abuse liberty. Liberty is given to us, not in order to hurt ourselves and others but on order to help ourselves and others.

### **1 Corinthians 10:29-33**

Literal:           29)           But conscience, I say, not that of yourself, but that of the other, for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?  
But if I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered for what I give thanks?  
Whether therefore you eat or you drink or anything you do, do all to the glory of God  
Be without offence to Jews and to Greeks and to the assembly of God.  
Even as I also please all in regard to all things, not seeking the profit of myself but that of the many, that they be saved.

Verse Twenty-nine:

Greek: συνείδησιν δὲ λέγω οὐχὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ ἑτέρου. ἵνα τὶ γὰρ ἡ ἐλευθερία μου κρίνεται ὑπὸ ἄλλης συνειδήσεως;

KJV: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?

NIV: the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?

Literal: But conscience, I say, not that of yourself, but that of the other, for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?

Paul now clearly points out that one's own freedom of conscience is not subject to the ignorance and the weakness of some other individual's conscience. The strong one who refrains from eating does it out of concern for the weak one and his conscience, not because of his own conscience. For his conscience gives him the freedom to eat.

The weak Christian ought not to sit in judgment on the liberty of another Christian and to order him to do what his conscience considers right and forbid him to do what his conscience considers wrong. Therefore Paul says that no other conscience can and dare restrict the Christian freedom of another in matters of adiaphora. We cannot for a moment make any other person's conscience a judge of our liberty, as to what we may or may not do, must or must not do in the field of indifference.

Paul is no longer speaking of the weak brother in this case but rather an individual who tries to bind another to his conscience. For this reason Paul, in this verse, uses the word ἄλλης – “any other,” referring to the conscience of any other no matter whose, whereas in the preceding phrase Paul used τὴν τοῦ ἑτέρου, referring to the conscience of that particular one, the weak brother.

Verse Thirty:

Greek: εἰ ἐγὼ χάριτι μετέχω, τί βλασφημοῦμαι ὑπὲρ οὗ ἐγὼ εὐχαρίστω;

KJV: For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?

NIV: If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

Literal: But if I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered for what I give thanks?

Paul now speaks from the view point of the knowledgeable Christian by laying stress on the thought that the Christian's liberty is not to be restricted by the conscience of another in matters of adiaphora as he points out that as he himself eats such meat, he eats it with thankfulness in his heart and with a prayer of thanksgiving on his lips. Paul therefore asks what right any individual has to condemn Paul for so doing. Certainly no right whatsoever.

The present, indicative, passive verb βλασφημοῦμαι, means to slander, to speak reproachfully, to revile, to rail at. What right does an individual have to do this when Paul eats of the meat since the meat is a gift of God and not used in connection with the idol.

There are two other interpretations of these last two verses besides the one that I have presented. The one interpretation says that Paul is saying, “Why should the stronger brother press the issue by not conceding when a weaker brother is involved since the stronger one knows in his heart that this meat can be eaten to the glory of God? Why should one press the issue when a weak brother is involved and maybe have the weak brother perceive it as being an act of hypocrisy and the weak brother then slander the stronger?” The Greek allows for this interpretation but it would seem that the sentence set off by γάρ in verse 29 is to explain why it is not because of our conscience that we concede but for the conscience of the weaker brother.

The last interpretation states that verses 29b and 30 are to be interpreted as an interjection of an indignant “man of knowledge” who objects to having his liberty limited no matter what the situation. The problem with this interpretation is that Paul does not respond to the interjection of this indignant man and also the supposed interjection is set off with the word “for” whereas if it were an interjection we would look for the word “but.”

Verse Thirty-one:

Greek: εἴτε οὖν εσθίετε πίνετε εἴτε τι ποιεῖτε, πάντα εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ ποιεῖτε.

KJV: Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

NIV: So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Literal: Whether therefore you eat or you drink or anything you do, do all to the glory of God.

In this verse Paul states a broad Christian principle of conduct. It flows very nicely from the examples that he has described. Paul not only points out that our eating and drinking can be done so that God might be glorified but anything we do can be done so that God might be glorified. We are to have our eyes fixed on God as we do anything. The promotion of his glory is to be our object in all that we do. As situations present themselves to us in our lives, we will want to ask ourselves first, “What is the best way that God will be glorified by what I do.” Certainly, in the example cited by Paul, if the stronger brother were to eat that meat at a home where he knew there was a weaker brother in attendance, his eating would not be done so that God would be glorified because the conscience of the weaker brother may be defiled. Also if a knowledgeable Christian would allow a persistent errorist to place limitations on his conscience and for that reason he would not eat, again in such a situation God would not be glorified. In all situations we will want to think before we act for the welfare of another and greatest of all so that God may be glorified.

Verse Thirty-two:

Greek: ἀπρόσκοποι καὶ Ἰουδαίοις γίνεσθε καὶ Ἕλλησιν καὶ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ

KJV: Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

NIV: Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God –

Literal: Be without offence to Jews and to Greeks and to the assembly of God.

Paul expands even more on how we can do all things so that God may be glorified. We are to avoid being the cause of sin not only to other Christians but also to all others, including non-Christians. The believer, without compromising the Word of God, will avoid both what may prevent those without the church of God from entering and what may alienate and drive out those who are already saved. Notice how Paul separates “the assembly of God” from Jews and Greeks. In this way he makes it known that the church of God is not made up of one or the other but anyone, from any race, who believes in the one true God.

Verse Thirty-three:

Greek: Καθὼς κἀγὼ πάντα πᾶσιν ἀρέσκω, μὴ ζητῶν τὸ ἑμαυτοῦ σύμφορον ἀλλὰ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν, ἵνα σωθῶσιν.

KJV: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

NIV: Even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Literal: Even as I also please all in regard to all things, not seeking the profit of myself but that of the many, that they be saved.

Paul now concludes this portion by using himself and the way he conducts his own life as an example for the Corinthians. He pleases all men in regard to all things. He has already described this in detail in 9:19-25, where he summed it up: “I have become all things to all men.” From the context, Paul cannot be misunderstood to say that he is out to win the favor of all men no matter what he has to do to get it, for Paul at once adds, “not seeking the profit of myself but that of the many, that they be saved.” Paul, in becoming all things to all men, never compromised any truth or sanctioned any error. In all things allowable, in the realm of adiaphora, he accommodated himself to all men that they may be saved.

Missionaries can give us many applications of what Paul is pointing out here. My father, as a missionary in Africa, learned the native language, not only to break down the language barrier, but also to become all things to all men. Often my father would be invited to eat with the Africans. What do you do when a dish is placed before you that you have no idea what it is or what is in it? What you do is go ahead and eat it lest you offend in any way. The missionary, however, has to be very careful not to place approval on anything expressly forbidden by Scripture. If an African comes to a worship service with a necklace around his neck having to do with witchcraft, what is the Christian to do? Certainly he will not wear a similar necklace for that would not be beneficial to the faith of the individual but rather extremely detrimental, for it would place approval on the witchcraft. The missionary, however, will want to be patient with the individual. He will not start out his instruction by demanding that the African remove the necklace. This action would not only cause the African to sin against his conscience but may turn the individual into a legalist. Rather the missionary will begin by teaching the Gospel of Christ and the basic doctrines of Scripture, allowing it to work within the heart of the individual and leading him to remove the necklace out of love for his Lord, having come to the conviction from God’s Word that it is a sin against the one true God to wear it.

σωθῶσιν is an aorist passive. The passive indicates that God, not man, is the one that saves and the aorist means “actually saved.”

### Application

Paul now points out what the stronger Christian’s relationship with the weaker Christian is to be like. It is one that is to be a patient relationship. He must remember that the weak brother is a brother in the faith, that his weakness results from the lack of knowledge in the realm of Christian liberty and that the stronger Christian will not want to do anything that will lead the weaker one to sin against his conscience. If the strong were to offend the weak in this way, he may destroy God’s creation of faith within the weaker one and thus he would definitely be sinning against God. In this case an adiaphora becomes confessional. For the strong is not to despise the weak or cause him to stumble, but rather bear with his weakness while trying to instruct him and strengthen him. For this reason, in a previous chapter, Paul speaks in forceful terms with regard to the duty of the strong over against the weak, “Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend”(1 Cor 8:13).

The guiding principle here as always must be love and charity toward the weak brother. If an individual, who was confused as to whether any consumption of alcohol was a sin, came to us for instruction, would we begin by offering him a strong drink? Certainly not! For this would cause him to sin against his conscience and thus sin against God. Some churches have kept alcoholic beverages out of any church function for the reason that there are some within the church who are weak on the matter of Christian liberty and may be tempted to sin against their conscience.

In this portion of Scripture, Paul tells us that, if we have knowledge of some weak brother who may go wrong because we indulge ourselves, we ought to forgo the indulgence. If we know that a man unable to control his appetite for drink were among our dinner guests, we ought not to serve drinks lest he sin against God.

Our concern is that we do not wish to give offense where we know we may be giving it. If, however, we know of no such danger, then we are to feel free to use our liberty as we see fit.

But the time may come when we must cease to have any regard for the weak in matters of adiaphora. That time comes when the weak Christian demands our acknowledgement of his erroneous position. The individual no longer is a weak brother but rather a false teacher who is trying to place an unnecessary burden on our conscience. Therefore our Confessions testify: “No one is to burden the Church with his own traditions, but here the rule is to be that nobody’s power of authority is to avail more than the Word of God” (Formula of Concord, *Thorough Declaration*, X, 21, Triglot, p. 1061). “Matters of indifference are and remain of themselves free, and accordingly can admit of no command or prohibition” (Ibid., p. 1057).

If, after patient instruction, someone demands that we must perform Baptism only by immersion, we are not to concede but rather demonstrate our Christian liberty by performing Baptism by sprinkling or pouring. If, after patient instruction, someone demands of us that the ceremonial part of the Sabbath must be kept, then we must not concede but feel free to do as we wish on that day.

If we were to concede to the false doctrine of another, one who is bent on spreading his error, even if it has to do with matters of adiaphora, we would be sinning against God by compromising his Word and by adding to it.

Here is another case when an adiaphora becomes confessional.

In conclusion, I would once again emphasize the importance of patience and instruction. As we deal with others, may we deal with them out of love for their souls. When we refuse to acknowledge their false doctrine, let us teach them from God's Word not only why their teaching is false but also why we are to "avoid" it and those who profess it. And when we deal with our weaker brethren, let us be patient with them. A day may come when they may know the Scriptures better than we do.

However as we deal with others, our love for God and his Word is to come first. We will never want to concede to false doctrine or compromise the doctrines found in God's Word in any way or for any reason. Our conduct with others will stem from our love for God and our desire that God may be glorified through us. For we have learned, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."