

# TTB - 1 Corinthians 8-16

## Joshua's Notes

### Context

- Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote this letter, around 52 CE
- Paul actually wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians, of which we have three.
- Paul's first letter to the Corinthians has been lost. He refers to the letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11.
- His second letter to the Corinthians is what we now know as 1 Corinthians. He wrote that letter while living in Ephesus during his third journey.
- After writing that letter, he visited Corinth for a short period (see 2 Corinthians 2:1), in what was apparently a difficult visit.
- His third letter, sometimes called the "severe letter," is actually found attached to the end of 2 Corinthians, chapters 10-13, which we will discuss tonight.
- His fourth letter, which has a much more conciliatory tone, can be found in 2 Corinthians 1-9.
- After this fourth letter, Paul stayed the winter of 56-57 CE in Corinth, continuing to guide the congregation in the proper path of a disciple of Jesus.

### Food Sacrificed to Idols

- Paul would not contradict the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:29)
  - he participated in the council and was commissioned as an emissary to spread its ruling
  - Acts 16:4 says he brought the ruling with him and taught it in Corinth (Achaia)
- What does God say?
  - Exodus 34:12, 15
  - Deuteronomy 32:37-38
  - Revelation 2:14, 2:20
- What about Paul's own teachings elsewhere?
  - 2 Corinthians 6:16-18
  - Romans 2:22

- Important to understand that Paul is responding to the things he is hearing from the Corinthians.

## 1 Corinthians 8

- Corinthian community had some people who were saying that they had knowledge, as well, not just Paul
  - Paul warns them that “knowledge” like this puffs you up.
- Then he quotes their previous letter to him in vv. 4-6
  - Their argument: Since there is no other God but the LORD (see the Shema — “the LORD is one”), and since an idol is not a god, then we should not be concerned with ritual taboos regarding idolatry.
  - Since there is no such thing as an idol, there is no such thing as food contaminated by idols
- v 7 — Philosophically, Paul agrees with them
  - Sure, there is some truth to this: God is actually the only god, and there is no such thing in reality as another god.
- v. 8 — Quoting them again, Food will not commend us to God
- v. 9-13 — Paul responds:
  - Yes, if you eat idolatrous food based on this philosophical argument, you might be right
  - However, in doing so you are not considering others who do not have that opinion
  - Also, you are doing something that might imply to others who don’t know or agree with your philosophy that you actually worship idols.
  - The appearance of evil.
  - This could cause outsiders to believe that followers of Jesus participate in idolatry, or could cause new believers to misunderstand the actual requirements regarding idol worship.
  - Paul says, “Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to sin.” — He’d be willing to take a vow of abstinence in order to ensure he does not lead others to sin.
- Who are the “weak”?
  - Paul says, (v 9) “But take care that this freedom of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”

- Echoing Jesus: “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6)
- Probably new converts from paganism. Their faith is still fragile.
- They need encouragement to actually break from the pagan lives they were called to leave.
- Seeing other believers participating in pagan food would not help them turn away from idols.
- Romans 14:22 — The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

## **1 Corinthians 9**

- Paul builds the case that the believers should conform to his authority and to the Apostolic decree in Acts 15.
- He does this by invoking his status as an apostle and reminding them of his work among them.
- Paul conducted himself appropriately among them, not taking a position of mastery or requiring them to support him.
- He did not fulfill his own desires when he was among them, he worked for the sake of the gospel
  - v. 12 — If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.
  - v. 15 — But I have used none of these things. And I have not written these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than that. No one shall make my boast an empty one!
  - v. 27 — but I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.
- Does 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 inspire “chameleon-like” behavior that encourages Messiah-followers to pretend to be what we are not in order to convince others that Jesus is the Messiah?
  - In the standard interpretation of these verses, many teachers say that Paul means that he would adapt his “lifestyle” or “behavior” to fit into the context of those whom he was seeking to reach. In other words, when among Jews, Paul would act like a Torah-observant Jew. When among non-Jews, Paul would act like a non-Jew, etc.

- This is the very definition of teleological ethics: “the ends justify the means”
- Dr. Mark Nanos argues that Paul’s evangelistic strategy involved adapting his *rhetoric* and his *argumentative* strategy, but not his general behavior when sharing the gospel among different groups. (see Dr. Mark Nanos, “Was Paul a Liar for the Gospel?” *Review and Expositor*, 110, Fall 2013)
- Dr. Nanos calls Paul’s method “rhetorical adaptability,” which involves “varying one’s speech to different audiences by reasoning from their premises.”
- We see this in action in Paul’s teachings:
  - Here in 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul is adapting his language to his non-Jewish “knowledgeable” audience in order to lead them to the conclusion that they should avoid eating meat that they know has been sacrificed to idols.
  - In Acts 17 Paul adapted his language to the non-Jewish Greek philosophers at Mars Hill.
  - Acts 17:2 shows that when teaching in synagogues, Paul adapted his language for dialog with his Jewish kinsmen from the Scriptures.
- Deception is not right, and is not an effective way of preaching or living the Gospel message.
- Paul was not a chameleon. He just tried to adapt his rhetorical approach to better teach different types of people.

## 1 Corinthians 10

- Paul, having appealed to logic and reason, now switches to build the case from the Torah that the Corinthians should refrain from idol food.
- Again, he quotes their earlier letter, then responds to their statements.
- vv. 1-11 — He begins by reminding them of the quintessential story of the snare of idolatry, the story of the golden calf. That incident led the people of Israel to destruction.
- vv. 12-13 — Just because you think you are strong does not mean that you can’t fall
  - Remember, the Israelites had just experienced the power of God and were actually under the cloud of glory!
  - The temptations you have to stray into idolatry are common to all men.
  - God does not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear, he provides a way of escape.
- SO FLEE IDOLATRY!

- vv. 14-18 — Connecting the food we eat to the communion we have with the Messiah and with one another.
- v. 19 — quoting the Corinthians — “What do I mean then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?”
- vv. 20-22 — Idolatry is worship of demons (not other gods, since there are no other gods— see above). Just as we partake of the Master when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we partake of demons when we eat their offerings.
  - Although Paul agreed in principle with the philosophical argument, there are still demonic forces behind the sacrifices of pagans.
  - Deuteronomy 32:17 — 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.
  - Deuteronomy 32:21 — They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols.
- Again, Paul is making the argument from the Torah that food sacrificed to idols is not acceptable. This shows that he considers the Torah authoritative, and that the Corinthians do, too.
- In verse 23, Paul returns to the philosophical arguments of his Corinthian objectors.
  - There are some quotes from the Corinthians here that are not marked in the English text.
- The Corinthians said, “All things are lawful for me.”
  - They were arguing from Genesis 9:3, which tells Gentiles, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.”
  - In other words, they are debating with the authority of the apostolic decree in Acts 15.
  - They are saying, “The apostles should not impose more restrictions on the Gentiles than the ones already imposed on Noah and his descendants.”
- Paul’s response is, “Sure, but not all things are of benefit. Not all things build up.”
  - His argument comes back to the question of what is actually beneficial to both the Corinthian Gentile believers and to those who will be watching them.
- This part of 1 Corinthians 10 bears some resemblance to rabbinic discussions on how to handle doubtful situations.
  - Paul has been trying to persuade the Corinthians to avoid situations that put them in the position of eating things tainted by idolatry. Remember, he said just 10 verses earlier, “flee from idolatry.”

- Take the following discussion in the Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 4:1). There was a Roman practice of putting stones on the side of the road in a tribute to the Roman god Mercury, and the rabbis discussed under what circumstances it would be acceptable to use those stones for something else.
  - **Rabbi Yishmael says: Three stones that are adjacent to each other at the side of Mercury [*Mercurious*] are prohibited**, as that idol was worshipped by tossing stones toward it, which then became part of the idol. **But** if there are only **two** stones, then they **are permitted**. **And the Rabbis say:** Those stones **that are adjacent to** Mercury and appear to have fallen from it **are prohibited**. **But** those stones **that are not adjacent to it are permitted**.
- In Avodah Zarah 1:5, the rabbis say:
  - **These are the items that it is prohibited to sell to a gentile** at any time of year, as they are used specifically for idol worship: [then the Mishnah lists some things that cannot be sold]. **And** with regard to **all remaining items, without specification** [that it will be used in idol worship] it is **permitted** to sell them, **but** with **specification** [that it will be used in idol worship] it is **prohibited** to sell them.
  - In other words, the rabbis prohibited Jews from selling things to pagan gentiles *if it was known* that those things would be used in the worship of idols. However, *if there was no specific knowledge* about something being used in idol worship, it was permissible to sell it to the Gentile.
  - What you don't know can't hurt you and isn't prohibited.

## Kosher Slaughter

- Now that we have shown that Paul was not actually saying that he agreed with the Corinthians' arguments in practice, and that the best practice was to flee from things that were sacrificed to idols, especially if you knew that they were used in idol worship, we should address another issue that comes up in this chapter: Did Paul agree with and teach the validity of the apostolic decree from Acts 15 that required the Gentiles to abstain from "what is strangled."
- This prohibition requires Gentile disciples to only eat meat that has been slaughtered in a manner consistent with kosher slaughter standards. (We can talk about this more later if you like.)
- Paul says, "Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions, for the sake of conscience."
- Does this mean that Paul disagreed with the Apostles' authority to make the prohibition?

- No, he was an emissary of the council in Jerusalem, and he upholds their authority throughout all of his other teachings. He confirms this in Acts 21 through his explicit act of obedience to the Apostles.
- Paul was not a liar and he was not an apostate, and when we try to explain his teachings in that way we stand in opposition to his own defense of himself.
- Does it mean that he did not consider meat that had been slaughtered for food as “strangled,” even when the method of slaughter did not conform to Jewish standards?
  - Some people suggest that Paul believed the prohibition on “strangled” meat was only prohibiting animals that had died by natural causes or by being torn by wild beasts.
  - They say that Paul was okay with any meat that had been slaughtered by a human method, even a non-kosher method.
  - However, the prohibition on “blood” in the ruling of the Jerusalem council came under the same requirement, and refers to the consumption of blood of animals in any form.
  - Due to this connection, the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15 has in mind the requirement of kosher slaughtered meat.
  - This was also understood to be the required practice by the early Christian community. Oskar Skarsaune (*In the Shadow of the Temple*, InterVarsity Press, 2002) discusses how Christians in France only ate kosher slaughtered meat.
- There is a third possibility: Paul was not discussing meat specifically, but food in general.
  - The Greek of 1 Corinthians 10:25 does not literally say, “Eat any meat sold in the meat market.” It says, “Eat anything that is sold in the μακέλλω.” That word in Greek refers to an enclosure or a market, not specifically a meat market.
    - TDNT says, “mákellon means —enclosure,|| then —market.|| Markets are rectangular courts with a dome-shaped roof, a fountain in the middle, booths at the side, and perhaps a room for sacrificial repasts.”
  - 1 Corinthians 10:28 does not say “This is meat sacrificed to idols,” it says in Greek “This thing is offered to idols.” Not “sacrificed”, “offered,” and not “meat” specifically. Lots of things can be offered to an idol, including things that cannot be sacrificed (wine, bread, etc.).
  - There are some interesting things to think about here, and it is important to look at the full witness of Paul’s life and message to interpret what he says.
  - As Peter notes, “just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which there are some things that are hard to understand, which the untaught and

unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”  
(2 Peter 3:15–16)