

Freedom Constrained by Love

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Corinthian Cultural Context

- In Corinth, as in other parts of the Roman Empire, pagan worship of idols was deeply embedded in the culture. This created lots of problems for Christians who couldn't participate in pagan practices (like offering incense to Caesar as a god).
- Meat being offered to idols was one such issue. Paul writes about it because it was a source of controversy in the church.
 - It was hard to find meat that wasn't offered to idols. Most (if not all) of the meat sold in the market place had been offered to an idol in one of the temples. It was believed that this helped to rid the meat of evil spirits, and it was a way to use the meat that was sacrificed.¹
 - Private dinner parties were often held in the temples and were important social occasions in Corinthian culture. Temples often had dining rooms attached.
 - Papyrus dinner invitation from around the time of Paul: "Chaeremon invites you to dine at the table of the lord Sarapis at the Sarapeion (sc. temple of Sarapis) tomorrow, the 15th, at the 9th hour."²
- Think about this for a minute. If you were a Christian in ancient Corinth, how would you handle these situations? What would you be saying to those around you if you partake?

The Uniqueness of God

- What is at stake in this passage is that some Christians felt free to partake of meat offered to idols (knowing that "idols have no real existence" v. 4), and others felt that it was not right to participate (perhaps because they had only recently become Christians and the pagan practices were still too fresh for them).
- Paul affirms that for us as Christians there is only one God. 1 Cor 8:6.
- People are fond these days of saying that "all paths lead to the divine." But this is a lie.
 - Coexist bumper stickers - yes we should coexist peacefully, but no, our religions are not all the same, nor do they lead to the same place.
 - Absolute truth vs. relativism. Mix and match religion.
 - Jesus did not leave other options open to us. He was very clear. Jn 14:6 "No one comes to the Father except through me"
 - The only secure spiritual foundation is that of Jesus Christ. Everything else is false.
- And yet, Paul acknowledges a few chapters later that there are real spiritual dangers involved in practicing idolatry.

¹ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 140–141.

² David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 148.

- 1 Cor 10:18-25 “what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God” v. 14 says “flee from idolatry.”
- Demons are real spiritual beings as we see evidenced in the Gospel passage this morning. Jesus has power and authority over these spirits, and in Christ we do too. Thus we do not need to be afraid of them, but we do need to be aware of them and their potential danger.
- We also need to make sure we don’t dabble (or dive into) the occult with things like Ouija Boards, Tarot Cards, fortune telling, and psychic readings. Doing these things is an open invitation for these evil spirits to come into your life.

Love for the Other Vs. My Personal Rights

- “Paul wanted the life of faith to extend its frontiers into every dark alley and moral cess-pit in Corinth. This required more robust consciences than many Christians, either at Corinth or at Rome, could muster.”³
 - How do you reach out into the world without getting caught up in it?
 - How do you befriend those in the world without giving the impression that you condone every part of their behavior?
 - The answers to these questions aren’t always clear
 - Baptist Pastor who never goes to the neighborhood margherita parties. He was challenged to go and he embraced it as a mission opportunity.⁴
- 1 Cor 10:25-28 - Christians are free to eat meat from the marketplace and to eat with non-Christians, but not if they are informed that the meat has been offered to idols. This is for the sake of the witness towards the one who said the meat had been sacrificed.
- 1 Cor 8:13 We must be willing to restrict our freedom for the good of those around us.
 - Christian missionaries often find themselves in situations where it would be totally offensive to the culture they are trying to reach if they engaged in practices which were normal and accepted by Christians back home. Alcohol is an example of this, especially in cultures where there is rampant alcoholism.
 - Clothing choices - modesty is a general Christian value, but some people get very legalistic about what is modest and what isn’t.
 - Media choices - some Christians choose only to partake of Christian music and television
 - Dietary choices - some Christians choose follow some OT dietary restrictions
 - These are all areas where we have freedom as Christians, but we might choose to voluntarily restrict our freedom if:
 - The freedom is causing us to sin
 - We are scandalizing our brothers and sisters in the church
 - We are marring our witness to those who aren’t Christians.
- Our choices have consequences. 1 Cor 8:9
- 1 Cor 8:1 “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

³ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 149.

⁴ Michael Frost, *Surprise the World*, Kindle Location: 558