

Implementation in Liberty

1 Corinthians 10

Introduction 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.

Connection 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.

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?

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)

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.

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.
- What is offered to idols and the idol itself is nothing. (Reflects on what he has taught in 1 Corinthians 8.)
- What the Israelite sacrificed [to idols], they were really sacrificing and therefore fellowshiping with demons, not God.¹
- 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)

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.

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 ori-

Deuteronomy 32:15-18

The Greek does not have *the Gentiles* in it. It has been added by translators to make the text more readable, possibly then obscuring Paul's reference to the Old Testament. The Song of Moses then is the justification for the apostles understanding.

¹ Possibly, "When a pagan eats the sacrifices at table in the temple he is sharing in or fellowshiping with demons, not God."

ental 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.23-30)

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 the our own practice of Christian liberty.

Correction of Their Attitude (v.23-24)

Response to Their Statement (v.23)

“Everything is permissible”, however:

- Profitable - self directed
- Edifying - others directed

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.

- Statement of the principle (v.25).
- Support for the principle (v.26)
See Psalm 24:1; 50:12; 1 Tim. 4:4

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.

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.

- Lessons**
- 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.