

Living in the midst of a pagan, idolatrous city situations could arise in which the Corinthian believers were uncertain what they should do. If meat offered in sacrifices is really nothing, but if participating in the religious meals is wrong, when could they eat that meat? Principles given in response to that question can help guide the believer today through so-called “gray” areas in which right and wrong are not so clearly defined.

- I. The needs of others are more important than my rights or privileges (10:23-24).
 1. A possible slogan of the Corinthians, “everything is permissible”, did not ignore clear commands and prohibitions but permitted anything that was not essentially prohibited. Paul while not totally disagreeing gave certain restrictions.
 2. Two considerations could restrict our exercise of liberty: Does it help or profit others? Does it build up another person spiritually?
 3. Ultimately others should be our concern before ourselves. It goes beyond asking if something is good for another in just specific cases to how do my actions (or inaction) affect others. This calls for a different continuing perspective in life.
- II. There is great liberty within the breadth of God’s creation (10:25-26).
 1. There was a high chance that meat being sold at the market had been offered to idols. But Paul tells them, do not ask questions, i.e., don’t ask about the source of the meat. Just buy it, eat it, be thankful and enjoy.
 2. Everything belongs to God and we can partake of it with thanks. Neither idols nor sacrificial meat are of themselves anything. Meat is meat and it can be eaten without defilement.
 3. But there is an implication: if you ask and find out that the meat has been offered to idols, then don’t eat it. A conscience might be “emboldened” (cf. 8:10) in the wrong direction, to wrongly eat when the conscience is weak, or to dull the “strong” conscience to accept a return to the temple festivals.
In general this principle warns us that we should not find an answer in legalism like the Pharisees, in which unnecessary made laws are made to keep one from even approaching the boundary of disobedience.
- III. Exercise of our liberty should not bring discredit to the purposes of God but rather glory (10:27-33).
 1. May a Christian eat meat in the home of a pagan? Yes, liberty extends to this situation as well, with similar restrictions. Don’t ask questions, just eat it, be thankful and enjoy it. But if the Christian is told that the meat had been offered in sacrifice, he should not eat it.
 2. Commentators diverge at this point in their understanding of verses 29 and 30, largely due to differing assumptions. I believe it is best to understand “anyone” as unrestricted (pagan or believer); “with thankfulness”(v 30) in its normal sense of “by grace”; and “for” (29b) as introducing explanations what they should not eat.
 3. Verses 28-31 could be amplified and paraphrased in this fashion “²⁸ if anyone – regardless of who it may be – says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” (so that it becomes clear that the food and especially eating it would be associated with idolatry) then do not eat it, for the sake of the person who told you, that is, for conscience’ sake – ²⁹ the other person’s conscience, I mean, not yours. What reason, either toward benefitting the other or building them up, is there when my liberties are brought into condemnation by the conscience of another? (There’s none!) ³⁰ If I partake by grace (not by obligation), why be getting slandered because of that for which I give thanks? (Don’t make into a curse, what is intended by God to be a blessing.) ³¹ So whether you are eating or drinking or whatever you are doing, do it all to the glory of God.”
 4. The freedoms we have must serve the higher purposes of God: spiritual growth in others, the salvation of non-believers, and, most important, bringing glory to God.
- IV. In all the example of Jesus Christ is supreme (11:1).
 1. The example of Christ is what we are to follow. As creator-God He had a right to honor, glory, and power. He gave it up to become a man and serve us by dying a death He did not deserve. Examine the life and ministry of Jesus to find what it means to glorify the Father and to serve others.
 2. The example of Christ is also what we are to model. Paul could say that his life was sufficiently like Jesus Christ, that others could follow his example, yet sufficiently not like Jesus Christ, that he had to point beyond himself to Jesus. We should be able to do the same.

There are clear boundaries of right and wrong which we can know from Scripture. In some so-called “gray” areas one’s decision may differ. But decision making in this area is much less gray. Use of the biblical guidelines is a black and white issue. Some questions to guide in this decision making include the following:

- Does it glorify God?
- Does it build up others spiritually?
- Does it in general take others into consideration?
- Does it disturb my conscience?
- Does it embrace the freedoms we have without violating the other principles?