

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1 “Liberty and Conscience”
Deuteronomy 32
Psalm 24

July 20, 2014

Deuteronomy 32 is Moses’ recounting of the wilderness wanderings.

I want you to think about several things as we read:

- 1) pay attention to the place of the “Rock” in this Song.
Paul will say that Christ was the spiritual Rock that followed Israel.
He draws that from Moses’ song.
- 2) notice the language of “demons” in this Song.
Paul will say that Israel in the wilderness sacrificed to demons –
and that food sacrificed to idols are also sacrificed to demons.
- And 3) listen for the language of eating and drinking.

Read Dt 32:1-47

The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?
The cup that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?
You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Table fellowship – communal meals and the rituals that surround them –
are essential for shaping who we are.

Think of Moses’ song:

In verses 13-14, the LORD suckled Israel with honey out of the rock,
and oil out of the flinty rock –
curds from the herd, and milk from the flock – lambs, wheat,
“foaming wine made from the blood of the grape.”

But when Israel rebelled, they “sacrificed to demons that were no gods” (v17),
“their rock is not as our Rock...
their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah;
their grapes are grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter;
their wine is the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps” (v32-33).

And so the LORD challenges Israel:

“Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge,
who ate the fat of their sacrifices
and drank the wine of their drink offering?
Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!” (v37-38)

Food and worship are intimately connected.
Even today.

We don’t see many altars for sacrifice in the modern world.
But think about our obsession with food – with diet:

if you eat this sort of diet, then you might live another 10 years!
That may not sound like a very good religion (compared to the promise of eternal life!),
but then again, if there is no resurrection – if this life is all you have,
then 10 more years might be the best you can get!

But Paul, back in 1 Corinthians 6:13, dealt with this:

“‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food’ –
and God will destroy both one and the other.”
Food is a good thing – created by God for our benefit –
but food is a servant, not our master.

Some people need to be on carefully restricted diets –
and that’s fine! –
but we need to remember that our chief end is not to live as long as we can
but to glorify God and to enjoy him forever!

This is at the heart of Psalm 24.

“The earth is the LORD’s and all that fills it.”
And our Lord Jesus Christ – the Rock of Deuteronomy 32 –
is the one who now has ascended the hill of the LORD
the one who now stands in the holy place!

And therefore we come in him – the King of Glory –
and we lift up our heads and our hearts and we seek the face of the God of Jacob!

Sing Psalm 24

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1

Paul’s conclusion in 10:31 is famous:

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

The Westminster Shorter Catechism starts from this point:

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

But Paul’s next statement is not so famous:

“Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,
just as I try to please everyone in everything I do,
not seeking my own advantage, but that of many,
that they may be saved.” (10:32-33)

This is a curious phrase:

“Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God...”

In Paul’s Jewish world, there were only two categories:

Jews and Greeks (or Gentiles).

But now, Paul says, there are three categories:

Jews, Greeks, and the church of God.

The church is a new race – a new humanity – formed out of both Jew and Gentile.
But this means that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile.
There is only “Christian.”

We saw that a few weeks ago in chapter 9, when Paul said:
To the Jews I became as a Jew.
What does he mean “as” a Jew?

After all, Paul was not just a Jew!
He was a “Hebrew of Hebrews”! (Phil 3)

That’s like the Pope saying “To the Catholics I became as a Catholic”!

But such is the radical transformation of Paul’s identity in Christ
that he *no longer considers himself a Jew*.

In our day and age, when “identity” is bound up in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality –
Paul’s statement “give no offense to Jews or to Greeks, or to the church of God”
challenges our basic sense of who we are!

Who are you?
How do you identify yourself?
Do you think of yourself as an American? a Canadian?
Black? White? Straight? Gay?

It’s safe to say that Paul had *always* identified himself as a Jew.
Philippians 3 has a catalog of Paul’s former identity.
But Paul says that *now* he is no longer a Jew –
and so therefore, when he is around Jews, he becomes “as a Jew.”

The church of God is his community – his people – his family – his ethnicity.

Paul’s new identity is in Christ.
I belong to Jesus.

What else belongs in that “core identity”?
Race? Ethnicity? Gender? Class?
NOTHING.

Who am I?
I belong to Jesus.

Your basic core identity is found in Christ;
your formative community is found with those who love him.

And *this* is why communal meals are so important to Paul.

Introduction: Food Offered to Idols (chapters 8-10)

Let me remind you of the way that idol feasts functioned in the Roman world.

I keep describing this throughout the sermons on chapters 8-10,
because if we are going to figure out how to apply this in the 21st century,
we need to see what Paul is addressing in the 1st century.

If you want to figure out where to find these idol feasts today,
look for meals that serve to identify you as a part of a community
that demands your allegiance –
where the more you partake in them,
the more you are drawn away from your allegiance to Christ.

No man can serve two masters.
You cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and the table of demons!

In the Roman world, these feasts were only *barely* religious (in our eyes).
The “liturgy” takes place at the temple –
and there are rooms/porches around the temple
for people to eat their sacrificial meals together in public.
The only “devotion” required is that you show up.
You don’t really need to believe anything!
You can get in trouble for mocking or denying the deity –
but so long as you go through the motions,
you certainly don’t need faith!
So, in one sense, these feasts are only barely religious.

But in another sense, these feasts remind us that in the ancient world,
everything was religious.
Your presence at the feast demonstrates that you are a faithful and dutiful citizen.
There was no ‘separation of church and state’ in the Roman world.

Almost no one argued against the rituals and customs of Roman religion,
since the rituals and customs served to bind the people together.
Indeed, the festivals were the primary means of exhibiting and forming civic duty,
as the whole city came together – setting aside their petty squabbles for the day –
in order to manifest the glory and power of the city.

So abstaining from these public festivals will marginalize you.

Because the problem is that food sacrificed to idols is *everywhere!*
Ancient Greek and Roman temples had dining rooms built into their courtyards.
The meat from the sacrifices would be prepared at the temple –
and wealthy patrons would invite their clients to feast in these dining rooms.
You could even say that the temples in Corinth operated restaurants.

So, if you are a Christian,
 what's the problem with going downtown,
 and having a meal together with your friends?
 So what if the restaurant happens to have a statue of Asclepius?
In fact, that's precisely the position held by "the strong" in Corinth.
 We're not worshipping false gods – we're just having a meal with friends!

And friendship in the Roman world focused on social and moral bonds.
 Friends had mutual and reciprocal responsibilities toward one another.
 And if your friend was of different social class,
 then the friendship took the form of patronage

In the Roman world, you need a patron – someone who will protect you,
 and help you negotiate the intricacies of life in the city.

And if your patron invites you to dinner at the temple of Serapis
 to celebrate the coming of age of his son,
 what are you supposed to say?

If you say no, you are saying that neither he nor his son is worthy of your time.
But if you say yes, then you will be eating food sacrificed to idols –
 something that the Jerusalem Council forbade in Acts 15.

The Jerusalem Council had said that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised,
 and do not need to observe the ceremonies of the Mosaic law.
Rather, as the letter of the Council stated in Acts 15:29,
 Gentiles must "abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood,
 and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality."

Chapters 8-10 will work out the details of how to think about these matters.
 First, there are the official "idol feasts" – liturgical events –
 where everyone agrees: don't do that!
 But second, there are these patronage meals – hosted at the "temple restaurant"
 (and Paul says that in theory these might be okay – but they are not prudent).

In chapter 8, Paul said that love for God
 means that you need to think about others as well –
 and especially those who were formerly enslaved to idols.
 Don't insist on your own "rights"
 when by so doing you will destroy others.

And then in chapter 9, he used himself as an example –
 pointing out that he has forgone his rights for the sake of the gospel.

And finally here in chapter 10, he uses Israel as an example,
 and warns the Corinthians that idolatry is still a danger.

The “gods” of the nations are not really *gods* – they are demons.
But that doesn’t make their festivals okay!

Last time, we saw how Paul used the story of Israel in the wilderness
to show how deadly idolatry can be.

Paul says that the temptations of the wilderness (idolatry, adultery, putting Christ to the test)
are common to man.

These things happened to them as an example – and were written down for our instruction –
so that we might not be like them.

And when temptation comes,
God promises that he will provide the way of escape.

In verse 14, he tells us what is the way of escape!

1. “A Participation in the Body of Christ” – Meals and Community-Formation (10:14-22)

¹⁴ *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*

Not just “depart” – but *flee* –
run away!

The point is not just “you might hurt others” –
but you might destroy yourself! (and others)

God has provided a way of escape –
so book it!

But what is the way of escape?

¹⁵ *I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.*

In verse 15,

Paul is so confident of the “common sense” of what he is saying,
that he invites the Corinthians to “judge for themselves” his words.
If you think about this, he says,
this should be *obvious!*

¹⁶ *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?* ¹⁷ *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

The cup of blessing is a term used in the Jewish celebration of the Passover.

But in Paul’s usage, the “cup of blessing” is plainly the cup of the Lord’s Supper.

As we bless the cup and break the bread we participate in the body and blood of Christ.

Paul uses the same word “koinonia” that he used in chapter 1, verse 9 –

to speak of our communal participation in Christ.

“Participation” is a good translation – but nowadays the idea of “participation” could be thought of in individual terms –

as though there is some “individual edification” that I receive from my individual participation in Christ.

Paul’s point here is that our participation in Christ is *corporate* – we all partake of the one bread – so we are one body, one bread.

I want you to see that our fellowship with one another is rooted in our participation in Christ, *and* that our participation in Christ entails our fellowship with one another!

Hence “communal participation” in the body and blood of Christ communicates well the point that Paul is making.

When Paul urges the Corinthians to “flee from idolatry” – he calls them to come – together – to the Eucharist. The word eucharist simply means “to give thanks.” The Lord’s Supper is our “thanksgiving” meal.

Communal participation in the body and blood of Christ “signifies identification with Christ in his death as both the source of redemption and the pattern for life and lifestyle” (AT 763)

Let me put this simply:

when you partake of the Lord’s Supper, there are two things that happen – first, by faith you are partaking of the body and blood of Jesus; as Paul says, “the bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” and second, by faith partake of Christ *together* as one body.

So in the Lord’s Supper, there is both the vertical connection with Christ himself, and there is also the horizontal connection with one another.

So “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (v17)

Our corporate identity – our community – is determined by this participation in the one bread.

The Didache speaks of how the various grains of wheat are brought together in one loaf.

Paul doesn’t use that exact image, but his point about how “we who are many” are one body, one bread, lends itself to that picture.

To partake of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper

is to be identified with Jesus – and with each other.

To put it simply,
if Israel in the wilderness partook of Christ,
how much more now do we.

Notice how Paul uses this argument in verse 18:

¹⁸ *Consider the people of Israel:^[d] are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?*

We saw in chapter 9, that the sacrifices were a major part
of the finances of the temple in Jerusalem – as well as the temples of the Roman world.

But Paul's point in verse 18, is more pointed than that.

He says, "Consider Israel according to the flesh..." –
which is to say, "think about the examples I've just given" –
when Israel in the wilderness offered sacrifices to the golden calf at Sinai.

Who were the ones who got judged?
It wasn't just Aaron and the leaders.

It was all those who ate the sacrifices –
because "are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?"

If you are engaged in the sacrifice –
if you bring the sacrifice, if you offer the sacrifice – even if you just *eat* the sacrifice –
then you are a participant in the altar.

And this is true both in true worship – at the Lord's Table, where we participate in Christ –
but it is also true in idolatrous worship – where people participate with demons.

Now, Paul knows that this may seem to contradict what he said earlier –
"we know that an idol is nothing in the world" (8:4)

¹⁹ *What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?* ²⁰ *No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

An idol is nothing.
It is not a god.
Rather, pagans offer sacrifices to demons.

The gods of the nations do not exist
(in the sense that there is no such being as Thor, Jupiter, or Baal).
But when the pagans offer sacrifices to Thor, Jupiter, or Baal,
they are offering sacrifices to *someone!*
Demons – fallen angels – do exist.
The scriptures speak of the "gods" assembling before the LORD –

and how even Satan is constrained to present himself before God.
Some of these gods were faithful (we usually call them angels) –
while others were not (we usually call them demons).

But if you belong to Jesus – then you cannot have any other god besides him!

²¹ *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.* ²² *Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

Oh, sure, it is *physically* possible to partake of both! – Israel did!
But if you attempt to partake of both,
then you will provoke the Lord to jealousy.

And God does not respond well to those who try to serve two masters.

Deuteronomy 32:19 goes on to say,
“The LORD saw it and spurned them,
because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters....
They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols.” (32:19, 21)

The last line in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 22, is particularly ironic:
“Are we stronger than he?”

Paul has been rebuking the “strong” in Corinth.
Now he uses the same word to say –
are you really so strong?
Are you stronger than God?

Because if you want to go on with your idolatry –
your flagrant disregard of what it means to participate in Christ –
then you had better be stronger than Christ!

A Christ-centered, Christ-formed life cannot be formed by any other religious practices.
And remember what we saw at first:
for Paul this even means that he, as a Jew, no longer thinks of himself as a Jew!
He still knows how to act like a Jew – and can do so when appropriate –
but that is not how he identifies himself.

2. Liberty and Conscience in Eating (v23-30)

a. The Principle: Seek the Good of Your Neighbor (v23-24)

And so in verses 23-30, Paul concludes this section
by applying what he has taught to a couple more situations.
He reminds them of the principle he articulated back in 6:12 –

²³ “All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

Paul is probably quoting from the Corinthians’ letter here –
saying, “yes, it’s true, in one sense, that ‘all things are lawful,’
we are no longer under the Mosaic Law as a paedagogue –
but that doesn’t mean that we do whatever we want!

Rather we must seek to edify – to build up our neighbors.
Christian liberty is not just the freedom to do whatever suits your conscience!
Christian liberty includes the freedom *not* to do what suits your conscience,
but to put the interests of others ahead of your own –
because you love Jesus!

So even as Paul applied this to sexual ethics in chapter 6,
now he applies this to food sacrificed to idols in chapter 10.

We’ve mentioned before that there were two places where Paul says Christians should not go:
1) there were meals that were part of idolatrous rituals –
Paul plainly condemns this as idolatry in chapter 8.
2) there were meals that were held at idol temples,
but were more “social occasions” (celebrations of weddings, coming of age, etc).
Paul says that Christians should *not* do this
because of how closely associated this was with idolatry.

Now, Paul deals with two situations where you *may* eat meat sacrificed to idols:

b. Application 1: the Meat Market (v25-26)

²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.”

Paul quotes Psalm 24 in order to point out that the created order is *good*.
Sure, Paul knows that most of the meat on the market was offered in pagan sacrifices.
But when the Jerusalem Council (in Acts 15) forbade Gentiles
to eat meat sacrificed to idols,
they didn’t mean that the meat itself is somehow corrupted.
The problem isn’t the meat – the problem is the idolatry!

You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

That’s why Paul says you can eat meat from the local market without question!

But what about dinner invitations from unbelievers?
Paul has already dealt with dinners at the idol temple (8:10) –
and he has said *don’t do that!*
But what if an unbeliever invites you to a private dinner at home?

c. Application 2: Dinner Invitations (v27-30)

²⁷ *If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.*

The reason why we know that this is dealing with a meal in a home
is because the meat served in one of the temple dining rooms
came straight from the altar.

If you are eating in a temple dining room,
you are *obviously* partaking of meat sacrificed to idols.

So if you are in a private setting,
you may eat whatever is set before you.

²⁸ *But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—* ²⁹ *I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?*
³⁰ *If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks?*

Again, the problem is not that the meat has been contaminated by idolatry.
The problem is the *meaning* of the meal to those around you.
When that person tells you – “this has been offered in sacrifice” –
they think that this means that if you eat the meat,
you are identifying with them and their idolatry.
Nowadays, we tend to say, “Who cares what they think –
so long as I know that I am right?”

But notice how conscience works here.
My liberty – my conscience – my rights – are not affected.
My practice is!

The question for Paul is not just an abstract question of “was the food offered to idols?”
The question is “what does your participation in this meal mean?”
Not just to you, personally,
but to your *Christian* community –
as well as to your *former* pagan community!

3. Concluding Summary: the Glory of God and the New Humanity (v31-33)

³¹ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* ³² *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,* ³³ *just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.*

Questions of “identity” and “community” are at the heart of what Paul is talking about.
People in Corinth said, hey,
we can engage outwardly in the worship of Roman gods *and* still worship Jesus.

Now Paul says that *in one sense*, it's true that you could eat meat sacrificed to idols –

because an idol is *nothing* in the world;
God made all things, and so all things are good.

But on the other hand, Paul recognizes that food has symbolic meaning as well.
If eating this meal will identify me with *this group* and its agenda,
then I must not eat this meal.

And so Paul urges the Corinthians:

Conclusion: Imitation and Participation (11:1)

11 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Paul is not saying “do exactly what I do” –
He’s saying, imitate my way of life.
Christ – the Messiah – the Anointed Son of David – our Lord Jesus
has established a new community –
has given us a new identity.

Imitation is rooted in participation.
We now participate in him – in his life – in his body and blood.
And so therefore we imitate him.

And what does that way of life look like?
“Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,
just as I try to please everyone in everything I do,
not seeking my own advantage, but that of many,
that they may be saved.” (v32-33)

Are you seeking your own advantage?
With your wife?
With your neighbors?

If you are seeking your own advantage,
then you are not imitating Paul – and you are not imitating Christ!
And if you are simply trying to please others, in order that they might like you –
then you are not imitating Christ.

The reason why you seek to please others
is so that they may be saved –
so that you might point them more and more to Jesus!