

A Matter Of Conscience – 1 Corinthians 10:23-30

Bible Study ~ 3/8/17

Grace Church of Lockeford

I changed the title after studying this. What we have in these verses is the necessity of considering the conscience in our exercise of freedom. The lesson Paul teaches here has application far beyond simply eating or not eating food.

1. Silence Can Preserve A Conscience vv. 23-27

v. 23 – This is similar to 6:12. While all things are lawful, not all things are helpful and build up. This word “helpful” clues us in on the point here. This word means *be profitable. To be advantageous – to be or become appropriate for achieving a particular end.* Paul has a specific end in mind and there are things that, while permitted for believers, will not help achieve that goal! What is that goal? Skip ahead with me to next weeks lesson and look at v. 33. Paul’s end game is the salvation of lost souls! Paul’s emphasis in this section is our responsibility to limit our own freedom for the sake of others. This is clearly spelled out in the next verse.

v. 24 – Don’t seek your own well-being, but that of others. This is a pretty tall order! It is also an imperative command. The exercise of our freedom is not to be done while only considering what is helpful and edifying for ourselves. We are also to consider what is helpful and edifying to others.

v. 25 – Paul has dealt off and on with the concept of eating meat offered to idols. Here he gives a solution. Just don’t ask. Buy the meat and eat it, don’t ask where it comes from.

v. 26 – Here is Paul’s reasoning. The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness. He already mentioned in ch. 8 that idols are nothing. Meat offered to idols is still meat. So for the sake of conscience, don’t ask questions and eat what God has made to be eaten.

v. 27 – Here again we have a mention of the conscience. If you are invited to eat with an unbeliever, eat what they provide without question. That way conscience doesn’t enter the picture. This verse provides a key to understanding the section. Paul is specifically discussing our behavior and its impact on unbelievers.

Biblically speaking, the believer has the freedom to eat whatever. We have freedom in a lot of areas. Paul writes to encourage believers to consider how the exercise of their freedoms can impact the gospel of Jesus Christ. There things we can do, places we can go, that are not wrong. But going there and doing that can negatively impact our ability to preach the gospel. “All things are lawful” but not everything enables us to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to those in need. Therefore, Paul is arguing for a voluntary limitation of freedom that we might build relationships and develop opportunities to reach people with the gospel. There are situations where the simplest and easiest solution is to remain silent. Don’t ask, just eat. But if the information is volunteered. Paul lets us know that...

2. Abstinence Can Preserve A Conscience vv. 28-30

v. 28 – Paul again quotes *Psalms 24:1* as in v. 26. If, while in the unbelievers home, someone tells you that the food was offered to idols, don’t eat it. Paul gives two reasons for not eating. First, for the sake of the one who told you. Second, for conscience. This could be either the person who invited you or the weaker brother from ch. 8. Though you could eat the meat because the earth is the Lords, yet out of consideration for those present, it is better to abstain. Further detail is given in the next verse.

v. 29 – In this verse and verse 30 Paul raises some questions that we will answer next week. What I want to point out here is that Paul is not saying he abstains for the sake of his own conscience. He has already said that food is food and idols are nothing! There is nothing sinful about eating or not eating. It won’t make you any more or less spiritual. Paul point in the end of the verse is that there is no value in flaunting freedom at the risk of the conscience of a fellow believer. Tom Constable states the end of the

verse this way “Why should another person’s scruples determine my liberty? The answer is, they should because his spiritual welfare is more important than our Christian freedom.”¹

v. 30 – While it is possible for Paul to eat meat offered to idols and be thankful to God for it. That same meat could offend a weaker brother and limit his ability to reach unbelievers with the gospel. Rather than offend, Paul will voluntarily limit his freedom. Tom Constable puts this verse really well. “The Christian can give thanks to God for whatever he or she eats, but we should limit our own liberty out of consideration for what other people think is proper. We do not need to alter our *convictions* for the sake of others even though they speak evil of us, as the Corinthians did of Paul (cf. 9:19–23). Nevertheless we should be willing to change our *behavior* for the sake of unbelievers.”²

The goal, as we will see next week, is to be able to win people to Christ. With this goal in mind, we should be willing to limit our freedom in whatever way necessary that we might have opportunity to proclaim the gospel. The souls of men and the conscience of our fellow believers are at stake. My personal freedom is not more important than they are.

CHALLENGE: Be willing to limit freedom that the gospel may go forth!

V. 23

Lawful – ἔξεστι *exesti* *be authorized; be permitted. To be permissible – to be allowed, especially as according to rule or custom.*

Helpful – συμφέρω *sympherō* *be profitable. To be advantageous – to be or become appropriate for achieving a particular end.*

Edify – οικοδομέω *oikodomeō* *strengthen; build; build up. To build up (construct) – to make nearer to fullness or completion (as of moral strength or someone’s conscience); conceived of as constructing something further.*

V. 25

Conscience – συνείδησις *syneidēsis* *conscience. The psychological faculty that distinguishes between right and wrong; either afflicts or comforts the person depending upon their actions.*

V. 26

Fullness – πλήρωμα *plērōma* *fullness. Fullness (content) – everything that is included in a collection and that is held or included in something.*

V. 29

Liberty – ἐλευθερία *eleutheria* *liberty; freedom. Liberty – personal freedom from servitude, confinement, or oppression.*

Judged – κρίνω *krinō* *judge; pass judgment on. To be evaluated – to be subject to the critical scrutiny of another.*

V. 30

Thanks – χάρις *charis* *grace. Thanks – an acknowledgment of appreciation (to a divinity).*

Evil spoken of – βλασφημέω *blasphēmeō* *revile; blaspheme; slander. To be slandered – to be or become maligned or denigrated with speech.*

Give thanks – εὐχαριστέω *eucharisteō* *give thanks. To thank – to express gratitude or show appreciation to (someone).*

¹ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Co 10:29.

² *Ibid*, 1 Co 10:30.