

1 CORINTHIANS 10:25-31

Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 21, 2023

Smith

²⁵ Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” ²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. ²⁸ But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. ²⁹ I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience? ³⁰ If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? ³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

The idea of the corner butcher shop is ancient, especially in a large city like Corinth. The many thousands of people who lived in the cramped houses and apartments of the big city did not have refrigeration, and that meant regular trips to the local butcher. They might not have had meat with every meal, but someone would stop by “Mákellon’s Meat Market” or whatever its was called, several times a week.¹

But why would there be a question conscience? Well, in a pagan city like Corinth, there were hundreds of shrines to the dozens or hundreds of local heathen gods and goddesses. And by “local” I mean that these little gods were localized, so that a sacrifice to the patron god of travel or real estate, needed to be made on the block or the quarter of the city where the god was rumored to dwell. So the butcher was also a pagan priest. When he cut up a chicken or a goat, the act or the blood was offered to the god and then sold to whoever was stopping at the market for dinner.

Should that bother a Christian? Maybe our gut instinct would say, “Yeah-- I don’t think I should eat something sacrificed to an idol.” But Paul puts a pastoral hand on our shoulder and says, “Remember, Jesus Christ isn’t in competition with the idols of Corinth. There is not such thing as that idol, except in the heart of the pagan who worships him. The Holy Spirit himself tells us through Psalm 24 that **“the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”**

So as far as buying your food, buy what you desire or whatever you need for your family, and praise God for it-- the true God. Because whatever that ignorant superstitious butcher at “Mákellon’s Meat Market” thinks, it really came from the Lord.

¹ μάκελλον is the Greek word in our text for “meat market.”

But now we come to problem number two. What if your friend, who is an unbeliever, invites you to dinner at his house? Paul says: The answer is the same. Go, enjoy the company and your friends, and don't ask where the food came from.

But if somebody with a weak conscience-- and this passage is really meant to help us with brother and sister Christians with a weak conscience-- if that person says, "**Wait, this was offered as a sacrifice,**" then set down your fork, spit out the meat your chewing into your napkin, and just have the salad. This isn't because the meat has changed or that you should feel guilty, but you don't want a weak brother or sister to think that its okay to worship an idol on Saturday night and then go worship Jesus on Sunday morning. They don't yet understand that idols are nothing, that there is only one true God, or in some other way they are troubled and led into sin according to their conscience.

Nobody should think that we can unite our faith with the worship of idols. In the same way, we can't join our faith with false religions by holding joint worship in the case of a wedding or a funeral. Either the service will be entirely Christian and of our fellowship, or we will not participate in such worship. Paul says: "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:16-17). And John says: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

Now, if by my freedom I can give God glory, then that is a good thing, as long as I do not hurt another man's faith. If by my freedom I might call a pagan to question his own religion and be drawn somehow to listen to Christ, then that is a good thing, too. And if in my freedom I am willing to lay aside that freedom for the good of another Christian, then that is a good thing, too. For "the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love."²

There are many things we might do that might cause a weak brother or sister Christian into doubt or into a temptation against their conscience. Maybe their church commands them not to eat certain meats on certain days. Be gentle with your friends; go out for fish with them and have the fish, but don't burden their conscience.

It's only when another Christian, especially a whole church, insists that there is only one proper way to do a thing that God does not in fact command, where we must take a stand and say, "No, this is permitted and pleases God." One of the clearest examples here is the way we baptize by sprinkling, although some would insist on immersing, even though the Bible does

² Psalm 147:11

not command us to baptize by immersing under water, and certainly the jailer at Philippi did not have his whole family immersed as they were baptized there in the jail in the middle of the night and probably in his wife's little kitchen in Acts 16.

When anyone does something that causes someone to sin, or to be frightened away from the gospel, then shame on him, and may God bring that shame to show him his deep sin. If someone dares to say, "In my freedom I can do this, and everyone should do it, because freedom is the important thing," then shame on him, and may God bring deep shame and regret over that, because freedom is not the important thing. What is most important is faith in Jesus Christ.

If a person in your life never becomes comfortable with something that you know you are free to do, and if they are always troubled by it, then let it go. Your freedom does not triumph over their conscience. When Paul says, "**Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God,**" it is not our glory or freedom that matters, but God's glory, and the souls of the people in our lives.

Live in the forgiveness Jesus won for you. If you've blown it. If you've hurt someone by insisting on your freedom when you should have been concerned about their conscience, then know that you are forgiven, and now put the consciences of your brothers and sisters and the children in your life in front of you always, like a person walking with a walker. Hamper yourself; slow yourself down. Stop running ahead, and bring along those who are weak, because getting to heaven is not a race. The better example is the shepherd being patient with his slow but beloved sheep.

Our whole lives, the sinful nature tries to strangle us. It's always trying to take control of the sinner. "**For the sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another, so that you do not continue to do these things you want to do**" (Galatians 5:17). But the fact that there is a struggle at all shows that your faith is alive.

So our good works are done by Christians willingly, according to God's rule laid down in the Ten Commandments and a guide to believers for godly living.

I might eat, drink, get a job, help my neighbor, pay my bills and other debts, sleep, wake, take a walk, entertain or be entertained, give a gift, care for my children, and my animals, and my home-- all to God's glory. Our praise and worship will continue to give him glory in heaven (Revelation 19:1), and so whatever we can do to give him glory while we are still here is an honor and a delight to offer. Amen.