

PREFACE

Let's begin this study by reading just the first portion of our text. Then we will circle back and read its entirety.

Read 29b-30.

It does not take a biblical scholar to notice that vv29b-30 seem to be awkwardly placed and, in the context, difficult to understand. Taken in isolation the passage makes sense, but we are confused by its placement: Why does Paul say this *here*? Just before this he described a situation where the believer must purposely relinquish his freedom for the sake of (in our interpretation) an unbelieving fellow guest. Now, at first glance, he seems to contradict what he just said.

Here we have what scholars term a “notorious crux” (you can tell they just *love* to use that phrase). This just means, in layman’s terms, that the text is sufficiently difficult to interpret that there is a multitude of opinions on what it really means. So the studious layperson is left to decide which of the various positions makes the most sense. As with science, the interpretation of God’s word is not necessarily based on “consensus”; one does not take a vote on the composition of the air we breathe, and one does not necessarily go with the majority on the interpretation of Scripture. For example, many commentators read this passage in light of their predisposition for the historically common “strong Christian/weak Christian” approach to the Corinthian letters. One might even say that is the “consensus” position. But if the interpreter establishes firm evidence against that position and *for* a superior position, he cannot then run back to that “consensus” position to explain a tough passage of text—such as the one before us. Mixed into all of this—and unique to the study of Scripture, as opposed to the study of the composition of the air we breathe—is the accompanying and necessary breath of the Holy Spirit. He must inform both the trained scholar and the studious layperson.

In my own study of this passage the interpretation that made eminent sense is that vv29b-30 pick up from v27 after the parenthetical interruption of vv28-29a ([David Garland](#)). This can be illustrated—without altering the text—by the insertion of parentheses.

If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake.

(But if anyone says to you, “This is meat sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience' sake;

I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's;); for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? (1 Corinthians 10:27-30)

Another way to illustrate this is to change the *order* of the text—again, without changing the words themselves.

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One reason this interpretation makes sense is that it happens all the time in spoken conversation. We say something that ignites an immediate thought that interrupts our intended flow of words. Paul dictated this letter to his amanuensis; it makes perfect sense that something like this would occur, and to my mind this explanation makes more sense than others put forth. Now let's read our entire passage, backing up and including v27.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:27-33.

vv29B-30

for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?

Just as we have the two bookends of v24,

Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

and the last part of v33,

...not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

to inform us of Paul's *horizontal* priority in this passage, we also have v31 that expresses his *vertical* priority:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

The Christian walk of faith is like no other. Part of our ongoing sanctification is a continual balancing of our freedom, our liberty in Christ with the good of our neighbor. And although there are a number of passages that speak to this, we needn't leave the two Corinthian letters for examples. As to liberty, Paul speaks of this in his second letter to the Corinthian church, where he describes the release, the openness, the boldness we enjoy in Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

In Christ the believer enjoys a freedom—the removal of the veil—that the ancient Jew under the old covenant never knew. At the same time, however, also in Christ we have the obligation to watch that our liberty does not impair the faith of another.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:7-13.

The earnest follower of Christ is always endeavoring to strike the correct balance between these two. We care about our brothers and sisters in Christ and have no desire to do anything that might obstruct or hinder their process of sanctification. Yet Christ has freed us from the constraints of the old covenant—and from the legalistic strictures of some sects today. We are not to become slaves to the vagaries of others. We revel in the salvation by grace of Christ, but we are also called to express grace to our fellow believers.

The “freedom” Paul speaks of in v29b is probably best understood to refer to freedom “from the power of idolatry” (F. Jones). As the apostle agreed earlier, “there is no such thing as an idol in the world” (v8:4), and for the Christian, “food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat” (v8:8). Chrysostom makes the excellent point that the uncleanness resides “not in the food but in the intentions of the sacrificers and the attitude of the receivers.” Paul’s point: *Why should my intentions be judged according to the intentions of someone else? If I am ignorant of the source of the meat (v27), then my conscience is clear, no matter what someone else thinks about the meat.*

But of course, as our text makes clear (v28), once we are no longer ignorant of its source (and that source is pagan), our priority becomes a consideration for those around us, whether believers or not.

If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks?

Paul’s outburst in v30 could be paraphrased, “Why should anyone denounce such behavior by a Christian who genuinely gives thanks for this food and has no intentional connection with idolatry” (Garland). Here he clearly refers back, not to v28, but to the two situations in vv25-27. And it also seems clear that he is responding, once again, to criticism of his behavior coming from some in the Corinth church.

v31

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

As we have noted before, there is a close connection between what the apostle writes about sexual immorality (*porneia*) in Chapter Six, and what he writes about idolatry (*eidolothyta*) here in Chapters Eight to Ten.

6:12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.

10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable.

6:20 ... glorify God in your body.

10:31 ... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

The Christian cannot live two different lives, nor can the Christian construct different rooms (or closets) in his life to isolate one behavior from another. *In this room I go to church and read my Bible, but in this room I visit prostitutes. In this room I worship Christ, but in this room I dine in idol's temples.* That may succeed for a season, but ultimately that way of life collapses under its own weight. As Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). And in both situations—sexual immorality and idolatry—Paul states flat-out, the Christian's highest priority and determining responsibility is *to glorify God*. When? How much? How often? Which activities? Answer: "...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

The world would see in this restrictive bars and handcuffs, but for the Christian it brings all the complexities of dwelling in this fallen world (and in our fallen flesh) down to the simplicity of one clarifying question: Does what I am about to do bring glory to God the Father and His Son Jesus? If the answer is yes, we do it; if no, we don't.

w32-33

Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

The common translation, "Give no offense," of the Greek *aproskopoi*, in all but the NIVs while not inaccurate can be misleading, since "give no offense" sounds like "don't offend anyone" or even "don't hurt anyone's feelings." That's not what it means. The NIVs capture it with, "Do not cause anyone to stumble."

aproskopoi = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a presumed derivative of <G4350> (proskopto); act. inoffensive, i.e. **not leading into sin**; passive faultless, i.e. not led into sin :- none (void of, without) offence.

Paul uses a related word (*proskommah*) in Chapter Eight, a parallel passage to what he writes here, which we read earlier:

But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a **stumbling block** to the weak. (1 Corinthians 8:8-9 emphasis added)

David Garland: In the context of his arguments about idol food and idolatry in chapters 8-10, Paul is concerned that the Corinthians' cavalier behavior might cut the ground out from under a fellow Christian who is already wobbly in the faith or solidify the ground on which an idolater stands in resistance to the gospel's message of one God and one Lord. Being blameless with respect "to the church of God," then, means doing nothing that might cause Christians to founder in their faith by giving them license to revert to idolatrous practices. Being blameless with respect to "Greeks" means doing nothing that might validate the legitimacy of their resistance to God. Being blameless with respect to "Jews" means doing nothing that might give them the impression that Christian teaching condoned idolatry and that becoming a Christian would entail abandoning the basic confession of one God.

...just as I also please all men in all things,

Again, we need to read this as it was intended. Paul was not a "man-pleaser" as his Galatian letter explains.

Read Galatians 1:10.

As one enslaved to Christ, the apostle serves *all* regardless the cost to him—just as he said in the previous chapter: "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more." (9:19)

11:1

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Yet again we have an unfortunate chapter break, for v1 clearly attends to what came before, not what comes after. Concluding his long treatise on "things sacrificed to idols," Paul summarizes the three chapters by entreating the church to follow the example of Christ Jesus—which he, as a faithful apostle, strives to do in all things. As we have pointed out before, this statement is not arrogant or self-serving; it all points to Christ, for "he [Paul] is to be followed only insofar as he adheres to the divine standard set forth by Christ" (Garland). And what was that standard set by Christ?

Read Romans 15:1-6.

Just as Christ gave Himself that we might be saved, we are to give of ourselves for the salvation and edification of others. And in this both Father and Son are glorified.