



1 Corinthians - Chapter Ten

IV. 1 Corinthians 7:1-11:1 - Three Issues from a Corinthian Letter (continues/concludes)

IV.c 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 - Sensitivity towards those of fragile faith (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Ten

Paul is concerned that history may repeat itself and provides a lesson from the OT with regard to the failures of the Israelites to acknowledge what God had done for them in bringing them out of Egyptian slavery.

Paul alludes to the fact that the Corinthians were now in a similar situation and he fears repetition of the same mistakes that were made in the wilderness, especially a return to idolatry. Yet he encourages them by reminding them that God is faithful and they will not be tested beyond their endurance.

Paul speaks of the difference between partaking fully in the Lord's Supper and accepting food sacrificed to idols in the manner in which it is intended to represent, that is, participating with demons. He warns against believers of the potential consequences of participating in both.

Finally, Paul returns to the theme of eating food sacrificed to idols but this time from the perspective of eating it in a private home, especially one of an unbeliever. Paul wants the Corinthians to act toward others in a way that will not inhibit the advance of the Gospel.

IV.c.iii 1 Corinthians 10:1-22 - Warnings from Israel's History

Paul commences with an abbreviated history of his Hebrew ancestors and how they were led out from Egyptian slavery by God through Moses. Yet they failed to appreciate what God was doing for them and they rebelled against him on many occasions, despite his constant guidance and material provision for them. Christians were now the new Exodus people and Paul was concerned they were about to make the same mistakes as their predecessors.

Paul then returns to the theme that had concerned him in Chapter 8. Although he had stated that the eating of meat sacrificed to idols was not a problem for those who truly understood the issues, he now starts to turn his attention back towards idolatry and sexual immorality, of which association with paganism could lead.

The church should be a unified whole brought together through participation in the Lord's Supper. The sharing of one loaf and one cup signify that unity. Yet by eating food sacrificed to idols, which are associated with demons and not God, can bring participants into moral conflict between choosing God and choosing demons. Just as Paul had shown there was no such thing as casual sex, here he indicates there is also no such thing as casual worship either!

¹ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,

1 Corinthians 10:1

Some translations start the first verse with the word 'for' that connects vv.1-22 with what Paul has been saying in chapters 8-9 about giving up personal rights and freedom for the sake of the Gospel. The example of Israel's experience in the wilderness should warn the Corinthians of what can happen to people who hear God's Word and see his works but do not come to true faith.

Our ancestors. Most of the Corinthians were Gentiles, but Paul assumes continuity between them and OT Israel, spiritual ancestors of Abraham: <<***This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants***>> (Romans 9:8).

The cloud, the sea refers to the generation of Israelites that God delivered from slavery in Egypt and led through the wilderness as recorded in Exodus 13:17-14:31.

² and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

1 Corinthians 10:2

All were baptised into Moses. God was in a pillar of cloud to lead Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness: <<***He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night***>> (Psalm 105:39); refer also to Exodus 13:17-22. He also used Moses to part the Red Sea to enable Israel to escape the pursuing Egyptian army: <<***He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him***>> (Psalm 66:6), who then drowned in the water when God, through actions by Moses, closed the sea over them, as recorded in Exodus 14:1-31.

Paul interprets these events as analogous to being baptised into Christ: <<***Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?***>> (Romans 6:3), and: <<***As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ***>> (Galatians 3:27). Paul is alluding to the fact that Christians are now led by the Spirit and are reborn through the waters of baptism.

Just as Jesus, in John's Gospel, spoke of being born again 'through water and the Spirit': <<Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit>> (John 3:5), so Paul can speak in this letter of the washing and the spirit: <<And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God>> (1 Corinthians 6:11); or baptism in the spirit: <<For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit>> (1 Corinthians 12:13). What he wants to say is that Christians are enacting the same drama as the children of Israel once did.

³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:3-4

Spiritual food, spiritual drink. Paul is referring to God providing Israel with manna, the bread from heaven: <<Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat">> (John 6:31), see also Exodus Chapter 16. He also provided water from a rock at Meribah: <<He split rocks open in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep>> (Psalm 78:15), and: <<He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river>> (Psalm 105:41).

Once the reader realises that Paul is drawing the parallel between the crossing of the Red Sea and Christian baptism in v.2, they should have no difficulty in realising that he is now making the similar parallel between God's provision of special food and a miraculous source of water for his people on the journey to their inheritance, and God's provision of the food and drink at the special Christian meal, the Lord's supper.

This rock appears both at the beginning of the Israelites' wanderings in the desert (Exodus 17:1-7), and again near the end (Numbers 20:2-13). Rabbinic exegesis from after Paul's time surmised that the rock followed the Israelites throughout their wanderings. This understanding of the rock may have been current in Paul's time. If so, this claim that the Rock following them was both spiritual and Christ shows that he did not believe that a physical rock travelled with the Israelites, but that Christ, in spiritual form, was ever-present with them: he was there to supply their need for water, and there to judge those who tested him (v.9).

Rock is a common OT name for God, for example: <<Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel>> (Genesis 49:24), <<The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he>> (Deuteronomy 32:4), and: <<The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold>> (Psalm 18:2); and this probably facilitated Paul's identification of the rock with Christ.

The account in Numbers 20:2-13 shows that God instructed Moses to command the rock to produce water but Moses struck the rock instead, as he had done on the first occasion years earlier. Due to Moses' disobedience to obey his command, God decided that it would not be Moses who would lead the people into the Promised Land. Paul's understanding that Christ was that rock aids further insight as to why God imposed such a sentence for what seems to have been an error by his otherwise loyal servant Moses.

⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

1 Corinthians 10:5

Struck down. Because of their disobedience and grumbling against God, the Israelite generation that experienced God's miraculous deliverance from Egypt and his provision of bread and water, did not see the Promised Land: *<<none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised me shall see it>>* (Numbers 14:22-23). Although they had seen many of God's miracles, only a few had genuine faith: *<<Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? But with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief>>* (Hebrews 3:16-19), and: *<<For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened>>* (Hebrews 4:2).

Just as nearly all the Israelites who were rescued from Egypt failed to make it into the Promised Land because of their failure to realise their privileged position, so too the Corinthians need to be aware that their own attitude to their rights could lead them to a similar failure to attain their eternal rewards.

What Paul has established in these opening verses is that the experiences of the Israelites was in fact God constructing a foundation for the building that was yet to be revealed. The Corinthians, like all Christians, need to realise that they too are building blocks for the life that will be the completed structure.

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did.

1 Corinthians 10:6

These things occurred as examples for us. Paul is indicating that what had gone before in the OT was there to instruct the future generations so they could learn from the mistakes made by those that had gone before. Paul also refers to this elsewhere: *<<For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope>>* (Romans 15:4), as well as giving an indication

of it earlier in this letter: <<*Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever ploughs should plough in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop*>> (1 Corinthians 9:10). Refer also to v.11.

⁷ Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.’

1 Corinthians 10:7

Do not become idolaters. Paul begins to make the case that eating in the temple of a pagan god is not actually the ‘right’ that the Corinthians imagined. Refer to 1 Corinthians 8:9-10, but is participation in: <<*the table of demons*>> (v.21) and idolatry. For a Christian to eat meals in such temples is to follow the unhappy example of the Israelites. They benefited from God’s redemptive work but still fell into worship of the local gods, starting with the building of the Golden Calf; refer to Exodus 32:1-6.

They rose up to play is a polite way of expressing the orgy that then followed. Paul was only too aware that such behaviour was commonplace in Corinth and he believed that some of the church were either continuing to behave in that way or were in danger of returning to such a lifestyle.

⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.

1 Corinthians 10:8

Sexual immorality. Glancing back to his discussion of sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 6:12-20, Paul reminds the Corinthians that God punished the wilderness generation of Israelites for the same sin. See Numbers 25:1-9.

Twenty-three thousand. Numbers 25:9 records: <<*Nevertheless, those that died by the plague were twenty-four thousand*>>. Both are fair approximations rather than an exact number of the people who died, which probably was all that either writer intended.

⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents.

1 Corinthians 10:9

Paul sees Christ as spiritually present with God’s people in OT times. This is also indicated in: <<*Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe*>> (Jude 5 ESV). This may seem puzzling to readers of Jude’s account, because the name Jesus is not applied to the Son of God in the OT. It is a prime example of the apostolic understanding of the OT, according to which the Son of God, in his eternal divine nature, was active in the world from the beginning of creation, long before his incarnation. It was Jesus then who had

judged and destroyed those in Israel who escaped from Egypt but who had failed to keep trusting in God, and therefore they did not reach the Promised Land.

In Jude 5, instead of the name Jesus, some Greek manuscripts have *ho Kyrios*, 'the Lord', and some English translations, including the NRSVA follow that reading. Most of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts have *Iēsous*, that is, Jesus, and this is reflected in translations such as the ESV quoted above.

The Israelites put Christ to the test, which is recorded as God in Numbers 21:5, as well as in the Psalms: <<*They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved*>> (Psalm 78:18), and: <<*But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert*>> (Psalm 106:14), by becoming impatient with his provision of water and food, which they found to be too basic for their tastes.

¹⁰ And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

1 Corinthians 10:10

Do not complain. Paul states this in a later letter also: <<*Do all things without murmuring and arguing*>> (Philippians 2:14). The Israelites became well known for their continual grumbling and complaints despite all of God's provision for them. This often angered God and brought divine judgement upon them: <<*Now when the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, the Lord heard it and his anger was kindled. Then the fire of the Lord burned against them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp*>> (Numbers 11:1). Other examples of complaining and subsequent judgement can be found in Numbers 14:1-38 and 16:11-35.

It is hard to imagine modern day Christians grumbling about what they have been given in life, especially those living in the western world. Or is it?

The destroyer is not mentioned in Numbers, although Paul apparently views the angel who executed God's judgment during the exodus as the destroying agent in these instances also: <<*For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down*>> (Exodus 12:23), and: <<*By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel*>> (Hebrews 11:28). One similar is seen in a judgement passed due to King David's transgression of taking a military census against God's will: <<*And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but when he was about to destroy it, the Lord took note and relented concerning the calamity; he said to the destroying angel, 'Enough! Stay your hand.'* The angel of the Lord was then standing by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite>> (1 Chronicles 21:15).

¹¹ These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

1 Corinthians 10:11

The use of these things by Paul was also discussed in comments on v.6

In saying that these things happened, Paul affirms even minor details of the OT, thus indicating his complete confidence in the truthfulness of every detail of the OT Scriptures. Paul's confidence thus supports the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

They were written down to instruct us. The OT Scriptures point toward the end of the ages, the age in which the Corinthian Christians were living. This is also confirmed in: <<*Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect*>> (Hebrews 11:39-40), and: <<*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look!*>> (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Serve as an example. The NT constantly talks about Christ and the salvation that he has brought. That is obvious. What is not so obvious is that the same is true of the OT, although it does this by way of anticipation. It provides 'patterns', 'shadows' and 'types' of the things that were to come.

A 'type', in the language of theology, is a special example, symbol, pattern or picture that God designed beforehand, and that he placed in history at an earlier point in time in order to point forward to a later, larger fulfilment.

Examples include:

- Animal sacrifices in the OT prefigure the final sacrifice of Christ. So these animal sacrifices were 'types' of Christ.
- The temple, as a dwelling place for God, prefigured Christ, who is the final 'dwelling place' of God, and through whom God comes to be with his people.
- The OT priests were 'types' of Christ, who is the final high priest.

Stuart Bell, the Senior Pastor at Allve Church in Lincoln, speaks of the church being built on God's patterns of structure, Spiritual truth, teaching, church protocols and lifestyle.

On whom the ends of the ages have come. The old age started to pass away with the coming of Jesus, yet it still rumbles on with those living in the present age caught between two poles. The freedom that now exists in Christ has, for some, become a licence to engage in former things that are not only unhelpful but in opposition to the Gospel.

¹² So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12

If you think you are standing is perhaps a reference to the Corinthians' mistaken 'knowledge' that they have the right to eat in an idol's temple as discussed in 1 Corinthians 8:9-10.

Watch out that you do not fall. Believers can have assurance of their salvation but they must not become arrogant, as some in Corinth had become, for it is all too easy to fall away from the Gospel truth unless they stand firm in their faith with all humility: <<*That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe*>> (Romans 11:20), and: <<*I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith*>> (2 Corinthians 1:24). There are many good Christian people engaged in living their lives appropriately, yet they find themselves travelling on two tectonic plates that, from time to time, collide causing moral earthquakes that can bring them down close to destruction, for it shakes their faith.

¹³ No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No testing has overtaken you. Some people view testing and temptation to come from Satan: <<*The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread'*>> (Matthew 4:3). However, most of it comes from within the person's own sinful nature imputed from the time of original sin. Paul notes that God is faithful, not only in providing the way out but also because he never instigates temptation: <<*No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one*>> (James 1:13), although he does allow testing, which can actually strengthen resolve to continue in the right way of life.

He will not let you be tested beyond your strength or tempted beyond your ability, will also provide the way out or an escape. Another apostle gives similar assurance: <<*then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement*>> (2 Peter 2:9). Even when Christians face morally confusing situations, they should never think that they have no options other than sinful ones. There will always be a morally right solution that does not require disobedience to any of God's moral laws or statutes. Sometimes the correct solution may be to accept death!

¹⁴ Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

1 Corinthians 10:14-15

Therefore, flee from the worship of idols or from idolatry. This is the point toward which Paul has been moving throughout Chapter 10. The Corinthians cannot

participate in idolatry and then think that they will receive eternal life on the last day. Refer to comments made on 1 Corinthians 6:16-18.

I speak as to sensible people. Paul and other NT writers knew that the people could understand what was being taught when the correct advice was given to them: <<*Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation*>> (Hebrews 6:9), <<*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul*>> (1 Peter 2:11), <<*Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard*>> (1 John 2:7), and: <<*Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*>> (Jude 3). Once they have heard and understood the teaching then Paul can ask them to judge for yourselves.

¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 10:16

The cup of blessing that we bless. Paul refers to the cup in the Lord's Supper; refer also to 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and the comments made there. Jesus gave thanks for the cup: <<*Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you'*>> (Matthew 26:27), <<*Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it*>> (Mark 14:23), and: <<*Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves'*>> (Luke 22:17); the earliest Christian observance of the Lord's Supper imitated this custom.

Sharing or participation, Greek *koinōnia*, sometimes refers to fellowship with Jesus Christ: <<*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*>> (1 Corinthians 1:9), or the Holy Spirit: <<*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you*>> (2 Corinthians 13:13), and: <<*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy*>> (Philippians 2:1); sometimes it means aligning oneself with someone else's plight or cause: <<*At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem*>> (Romans 15:25-26), <<*For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints*>> (2 Corinthians 8:3-4), <<*Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others*>> (2 Corinthians 9:13), <<*and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of*

fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised>> (Galatians 2:9), <<*I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now*>> (Philippians 1:3-5), and: <<*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death*>> (Philippians 3:10). Since this context emphasises the incompatibility of participating in meals in pagan temples and participating in the Lord's Supper (v.21), Paul probably means that those who eat the Lord's Supper align themselves with Jesus, share his sufferings, refer back to Philippians 3:10, and benefit from his death. See also the comments on v.18.

¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 10:17

One bread, one body. After Jesus gave thanks for and broke the bread, he said: <<*This is my body that is for you*>> (1 Corinthians 11:24b). The church is also Christ's body: <<*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ*>> (1 Corinthians 12:12), <<*And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*>> (Ephesians 1:22-23). The Lord's Supper, therefore, is an occasion when members of the church declare their unity with each other because of their common unity with Christ.

¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?

1 Corinthians 10:18

Participants or **partners in the altar**, Greek *koinōnoi*, is a term closely related to *koinōnia* that was discussed in v.16.

The altar in the OT was a table on which food was sacrificed to God, and the priests ate from the offerings, for example: <<*It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my offerings by fire; it is most holy, like the sin-offering and the guilt-offering. Every male among the descendants of Aaron shall eat of it, as their perpetual due throughout your generations, from the Lord's offerings by fire; anything that touches them shall become holy*>> (Leviticus 6:17-18).

The altar, therefore, provided an apt analogy to: <<*the table of the Lord*>> (v.21), since in both instances the benefits of the table belonged to the priests, inasmuch as believers in Christ are priests to God: <<*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*>> (1 Peter 2:9), and: <<*To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God*>>

and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen>>
(Revelation 1:5b-6).

Paul's argument is that, because in the Lord's supper believers really do share in the body and blood of Christ, making them a united body in him, and because in national or ethnic Israel those who worship at the Temple really do become partners in the altar, which seems to mean 'people who share the very life of God', then by analogy those who worship, including eating and drinking, in the temple of an idol may well be becoming partners and sharers with the idol itself, or at least the misguided or evil intent that is behind such worship.

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

1 Corinthians 10:19-20

What do I imply then? that an idol is anything? In 1 Corinthians 8:4, Paul had confirmed that idols do not exist, but are merely man-made objects or concepts. However, he is also aware of the spiritual context that any sort of association with idol worship can bring into force. This is what he is warning of.

Paul knows that demons delight in the worship of any god other than the one true God, and therefore take a special interest in idolatry. In: <<*They sacrificed to demons, not God, to deities they had never known, to new ones recently arrived, whom your ancestors had not feared. You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth*>> (Deuteronomy 32:17-18), sacrifice to false gods, called demons there, is contrasted with worship of God, who is called 'the Rock' in v.4. False religions are not merely the result of human imagination and human energy, but generally have demonic power behind them. Not everything that seems supernatural is from God.

Such sacrificial worship has led people into all types of abominations: <<*They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons*>> (Psalm 106:37), **something that seems set to continue until the end:** <<*The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk*>> (Revelation 9:20).

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.

1 Corinthians 10:21

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. The crux of Paul's argument is that those who sit at the Lord's table and share in his life, the life, that is, of the human embodiment of the one true God, cannot and must not flirt with the possibility of sharing the life of the powers, the malevolent forces as they are known, that twist and distort God's world and God's image-bearing human children: <<*What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does*

a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'>> (2 Corinthians 6:15-16).

²² Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

1 Corinthians 10:22

God's jealousy is not the sinful emotion of envy that characterises human jealousy. It is God's righteous concern to protect the truth that he is the Creator of the universe and that he alone, and not gods of human invention, deserves human praise. Those who worship idols provoke the Lord to jealousy and receive his wrath, as Israel had experienced in the wilderness: *<<You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me>> (Exodus 20:4-5), and: <<So be careful not to forget the covenant that the Lord your God made with you, and not to make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God>> (Deuteronomy 4:23-24).*

The OT provides other examples of this, including: *<<They made me jealous with what is no god, provoked me with their idols. So I will make them jealous with what is no people, provoke them with a foolish nation>> (Deuteronomy 32:21), <<Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their ancestors had done>> (1 Kings 14:22), <<For they provoked him to anger with their high places; they moved him to jealousy with their idols>> (Psalm 78:58), and: <<Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to settle? Will you be cut off and become an object of cursing and ridicule among all the nations of the earth?>> (Jeremiah 44:8).*

Are we stronger than he? Anyone would be more than foolish to think they could succeed in any direct action against God's will: *<<Let their own eyes see their destruction, and let them drink of the wrath of the Almighty>> (Job 21:20), <<Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what human beings are, and that they are not able to dispute with those who are stronger>> (Ecclesiastes 6:10), and: <<Woe to you who strive with your Maker, earthen vessels with the potter! Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'>> (Isaiah 45:9).*

IV.c.iv 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1 - Do All to the Glory of God

Paul now begins to address a different issue entirely from the problem that has consumed his attention in Chapter 8 and 10:1-22. Those sections dealt with eating meals in pagan temples, but this section deals with meat previously sacrificed to idols being eaten in private homes, especially the home of an unbeliever (10:27-

30). The principles Paul has developed in Chapter 9, however, still apply. Paul wants the Corinthians to act toward others in a way that will not inhibit the advance of the Gospel.

²³ ‘All things are lawful’, but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful’, but not all things build up.

1 Corinthians 10:23

‘All things are lawful’. The quotation marks around this phrase, both here and in 1 Corinthians 6:12, have been supplied to indicate that it was probably a commonly used slogan among the Corinthians. It basically means ‘I can do whatever I want’.

Not all things build up. As commented on in 1 Corinthians 8:10-11, the actions by those of strong conscience in eating food sacrificed to idols could actually destroy the weaker members of the church.

²⁴ Do not seek your own advantage, but that of others.

1 Corinthians 10:24

Your own advantage. Paul brings out a fundamental truth of Christian living. People are not called by God to look after number one but to do what they can to help others, while ensuring their own lives are in order. There is nothing to say that a believer cannot enjoy a good life, have a successful career and all the material benefits that can go with it. They are simply to be mindful of the Gospel teaching and be aware of how they can raise others up as well. Elsewhere, Paul also calls for tolerance between believers: <<***We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves***>> (Romans 15:1).

²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, ²⁶ for ‘the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.’

1 Corinthians 10:25-26

Sold in the meat market. As commented on in Chapter 8, not all the meat sacrificed to idols in the pagan temples was consumed due to the sheer volume of what was offered. Much of it was also sold for general consumption in local markets.

On the ground of conscience. Paul would wish that all believers were trained to have a strong moral conscience and understanding of the Gospel. However, he is aware that it will take time to achieve that, if it is ever achieved in this life. Therefore, he calls on his readers not to make an issue of such things but to accept what is given with thanksgiving to God.

The earth and its fullness are the Lord’s is based on the words of King David: <<***The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers***>> (Psalm 24:1-2). This is classic monotheism, Jewish-style, at its best: robust, intelligent, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

1Corinthians10-13

and wholehearted. God made everything and he made it very good: <<**God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day**>> (Genesis 1:31). As with holiness and pollution in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, God's holiness does not need protecting. Goodness is, after all, more powerful than evil.

²⁷ If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

1 Corinthians 10:27

Without raising any question. The Christian is not to question the host about whether the food being served had ever been involved in pagan rituals. Such questions are theologically unnecessary (vv.25-26), and because they could be perceived as rude, they violate the principle of vv.23-24 and 9:19-23. Jesus also spoke of disciples accepting whatever food was presented to them by their host: <<**Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house**>> (Luke 10:7).

²⁸ But if someone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice', then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience — ²⁹ I mean the other's conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgement of someone else's conscience? ³⁰ If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?

1 Corinthians 10:28-30

Someone says to you. This person may be:

1. An unbeliever who erroneously thinks that Christians must abstain from such food and is confronting a believer with a test of faith.
2. An unbeliever who thinks Christians abstain from such food and, in good faith, wants the Christian to know where it came from.
3. A weak believer whose conscience erroneously dictates that Christians should avoid such food: <<**For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?**>> (1 Corinthians 8:10), and: <<**Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble**>> (Romans 14:20-21).

Since the person's conscience motivated the comment, and the weak believer's conscience was an important concern in 1 Corinthians 8:7-13, this last option is most likely.

Do not eat it, out of consideration. Paul is not saying the believer cannot eat the food because he now knows it to be a sacrificial offering. He is to abstain for the sake of the other person. That is, that he would not put a stumbling-block in that person's way. Refer to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 8:9.

For which I give thanks. As a general rule, saying a prayer of thanks to the one true God indicates that the food on the table is morally fit for a Christian to eat: <<*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer*>> (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Whether you eat or drink. Earlier in the chapter Paul was saying do not eat food sacrificed to idols. Now he appears to be saying it is OK. What he is actually saying is that it is not the food but the location in which it is consumed. If that is at a pagan temple then a person may be guilty of pagan worship by association.

Whatever you do. This is not a licence to do anything one wishes but a reminder that there are many things believers can do if their heart is right for God while they are doing it. As the prophet says, there will come a day when everything is put right: <<*On that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'Holy to the Lord.' And the cooking-pots in the house of the Lord shall be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar; and every cooking-pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day*>> (Zechariah 14:20-21).

Do everything for the glory of God. Every aspect of every Christian's life has the potential to honour God and should be conducted as an act of worship.

³² Give no offence 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, so that they may be saved.

1 Corinthians 10:32-33

The great conclusion sums up everything a Christian needs to know about a holy life before the watching world. Whatever one does, do it to God's glory (v.31). At the same time, give no offence, in so far as that is possible, to any of the three categories into which the world is now divided: Jews, Greeks and the church of God. This may seem easier said than done until it is realised that in these last verses Paul has shown both the bigger picture of the Kingdom, and also some of the detail of how this might work out in practice.

I try to please everyone. Paul gave similar advice to the church in Rome: <<*Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the*

neighbour. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me'>> (Romans 15:2-3).

So that they may be saved. This is the sole aim of the evangelical teacher. It is not just about the teaching but a practical demonstration in life that will help others to live their lives for Christ and be brought into his Kingdom.

Chapter 11:1 is included here to complete the major section Three Issues from a Corinthian Letter, which commenced in Chapter 7:1. It refers to what Paul has been writing about, rather than belonging to the subject of Chapter 11.

¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me. God has designed the Christian life so that much of one's progress comes through imitating other Christians, imperfect though they are: <<*Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us*>> (Philippians 3:17), <<*For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:7), <<*Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity*>> (1 Timothy 4:12), <<*Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us*>> (Titus 2:7-8), and: <<*Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock*>> (1 Peter 5:3).

Paul is a good role model for the Corinthians and indeed others for he had modelled himself on Christ. The church in Thessalonica followed Paul's example: <<*For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judæa, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:14).