

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Chapter 10

Warning Against Idolatry

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 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. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. 6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 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. 18 Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? 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. 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?

Paul is aware that complacency could cause him to forfeit the heavenly prize (1 Cor 9:23–27). Now he turns from himself to the Corinthians. For them, too, the danger of being “disqualified” (9:27) is real. Paul expresses his concern for them with these words: “I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers” (10:1), a formula he commonly uses “to introduce something new and important.” (CC p. 322)

The imagery of the athletic games (9:24–27) is left behind, and the apostle turns to the OT, which provides instruction relevant for the church in the NT era (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11). Although the Corinthian church consisted mainly of Gentile Christians, these had now been grafted into the vine of Israel and were as much entitled as any Jewish Christian to think of the fathers of the Jewish people as “our fathers” in faith (1 Cor 10:1; cf. Rom 4:11–12 on Abraham’s role as the father of all believers, whether circumcised or uncircumcised). The Christian church is the true Israel (Gal 6:16). (CC pp. 322-323)

10:1-5 Admittedly, the baptism into Moses and the spiritual eating and drinking in the wilderness were only shadows of the great sacraments of the NT era, Christian Baptism and the Lord's Supper. But it would be contrary to Paul's argument to claim that these OT types lacked any relationship to the NT sacraments. Paul clearly accords them significance as prefigurements of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. He draws a parallel between the Israelites, who were "baptized into Moses" (10:2) and ate the "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink" (10:3-4), and the Christians in Corinth. He emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing the Corinthians to faith in Christ through the Gospel (2:10-16). By the Holy Spirit they confessed Jesus as Lord (12:1-3). The Corinthians had received Christian Baptism: "we all were baptized with one Spirit into one body ... and we all were given to drink one Spirit" (12:13). They also had partaken of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (10:16-17; 11:23-34). Moreover, many had received various kinds of "spiritual gifts" (12:1; 14:1). (CC pp. 325-326)

Paul's purpose in drawing the parallel is this: *just as many Israelites were disqualified because of their unfaithfulness and false worship, Christians too face the danger of being disqualified from salvation if they engage in false worship and fail to remain in repentance and faith worked by the Holy Spirit.* (CC p. 326)

Paul will make explicit this purpose in the following verses (10:6-14). He first spoke of the possibility that he himself might be "disqualified" from salvation if he did not exercise self-discipline (1 Cor 9:27). The need for Christians to avoid false worship is a central theme in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Paul will spell out the dire consequences of abusing the Lord's Supper in 11:27-34. (CC p. 326)

In its attitude toward the sacraments, the church faces two equal and opposite temptations. One is the danger to which most of the Israelites and some of the Corinthians succumbed: the adoption of a complacent, "magical," or *ex opere operato* view that there is spiritual benefit in simply "going through the motions," taking the sacraments for granted and forgetting that their purpose is to engender and strengthen faith. Faith should lead to godly lives and appropriate works. A Christian cannot participate in the sacraments and then blithely continue to live in sin. Paul stated categorically that unrighteous people will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9-10; see also the excommunication of the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5). Hays suggests that the Corinthians may have been arguing that "having participated in the mysteries of baptism and the Lord's Supper, they [had] passed into a zone of spiritual blessedness that [made] them immune to any harm from associating with pagan worship." The Corinthians misunderstood Baptism and failed to grasp their baptismal unity in Christ (1:10-16). Some of them saw nothing wrong with dining in pagan temples (8:9-13; 10:14-31) and also partaking of the Lord's Supper (10:16-17, 21). The church as a whole abused the Supper (11:17-22). (CC p. 326)

The other danger is for the church to detract from the reality and power of the sacraments as true spiritual food and drink, and reduce them to mere symbols. This happens when Christians consider Baptism to be merely a human action—a demonstration of *our* faith, rather than an action of God which confers the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, life, and salvation, as Scripture affirms (e.g., Acts 2:38-39; 1 Pet 3:21). Regarding the Lord's Supper, this second danger occurs when Christians fail to discern the Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament, which give to the communicant the benefits earned by Christ when he gave his body and shed his blood on the cross. (CC p. 326)

Commenting on 1 Cor 10:3, Chemnitz writes this:

Surely the text expressly and clearly deals with the point that the ancients among themselves had the same sacraments. For he says: “Our fathers all ate the same food.” And the ancient church fathers, except for Augustine, interpreted this passage this way. . . . Paul applies this statement to his own situation in this way: Just as the same sacraments were held in common by all in the Old Testament, so also we in the New Testament all have the same sacraments, namely, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But just as then in the Old Testament God was not pleased with all who used these sacraments . . . so also in the New Testament debauchers, fornicators, idolators, etc. [1 Cor 6:9–10], should not delude themselves because they have the same Baptism and the same Supper as the pious use. It is perfectly clear that Paul instituted and proposed this in order that he might take away from the Corinthians that false delusion that debauchery, whoring, communion with idols [1 Cor 10:16–21], etc., could not hurt them since they had been baptized and used the same Lord’s Supper as did the truly pious. (CC p. 327)

The church’s traditional understanding of 10:1–4 is finely preserved in the so-called “flood prayer” in Luther’s Order of Baptism:

Almighty eternal God, who according to thy righteous judgment didst condemn the unbelieving world through the flood and in thy great mercy didst preserve believing Noah and his family, *and who didst drown hardhearted Pharaoh with all his host in the Red Sea and didst lead thy people Israel through the same on dry ground, thereby prefiguring this bath of thy baptism*, and who through the baptism of thy dear Child, our Lord Jesus Christ, hast consecrated and set apart the Jordan and all water as a salutary flood and a rich and full washing away of sins: We pray through the same thy groundless mercy that thou wilt graciously behold this N. [name of the person being baptized] and bless him with true faith. (CC p. 327)

10:1 for – γάρ—The particle (“for”) is left untranslated by RSV, NRSV, GNB, and JB. However, it has an important role in linking the argument of chapter 10 to chapter 9. The danger of being “disqualified” from salvation (9:27) is real, as the history of Israel proves. CC p. 321)

all – “All” of our fathers (1 Cor 10:1) experienced the exodus deliverance and God’s sustenance in the wilderness. The word “all” occurs five times in 10:1–4 and receives emphasis throughout the section. The whole nation received God’s grace. Paul first makes the point that *all* received these benefits *objectively*—all who passed through the sea and ate and drank in the wilderness. (Later, in 10:5–13, he will describe how *subjectively* many failed to receive and respond to God’s gifts *in faith*.) (CC p. 323)

Forefathers in the faith, the children of Israel. (TLSB)

under the cloud. Under God’s leadership and guidance (Ex 13:21–22; Nu 9:15–23; 14:14; Dt 1:33; Ps 78:14). His guidance did not fail them—he successfully led them through the sea (Ex 14:22, 29). (CSB)

The pillar of cloud that led the Israelites. (TLSB)

All were “under the cloud” (10:1) of God’s glorious presence and power. The Lord went before them “in a pillar of cloud” (Ex 13:21), and at one point the cloud moved behind them to protect them (Ex 14:19). Other texts speak of the Lord spreading “a cloud for a covering” (Ps 105:39; cf. Wisdom 19:7). The people were under a protective canopy. (CC p. 323)

passed through the sea – As the Lord provided this protection, they “all passed through the sea” (1 Cor 10:1). The waters of the Red Sea became a protective “wall to them on their right hand and on their left” (Ex 14:22). Like Noah and his family, they were saved through water (Genesis 6–8; 1 Pet 3:20–21). (CC p. 323)

The crossing of the Red Sea. (CLSB)

10:2 As a people, they were united under God’s redemptive program, and they submitted to Moses, God’s appointed leader (Ex 14:31). (CSB)

baptized.† A figure used to depict their submission to Moses as their deliverer and leader, just as Christian baptism, essentially a means of grace, also depicts the believer’s submission to Christ as Savior and Lord. (CSB)

A metaphor for the Israelites who passed through the waters of the Red Sea and emerged a new people, saved from slavery. (TLSB)

Israel’s safe passing through the waters of the Red Sea prefigures and typifies

Paul uses the noun τύπος, “prefiguration, type, pattern,” in 1 Cor 10:6 and the adverb τυπικῶς, “as a pattern, typologically,” in 10:11. When this commentary uses the words “type” and “typify,” it is referring to Paul’s hermeneutic in 10:6, 11, which also pertains to his overall interpretation of the OT in many other passages in his epistles. (CC p. 323)

the waters of Baptism. At the Red Sea, all the covenant people “were baptized into Moses” (1 Cor 10:2). They submitted to his leadership as he guided them through the waters, and when they saw what the Lord accomplished there, they “believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses” (Ex 14:31). Their salvation “in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor 10:2) led them to a trusting, personal relationship with the great mediator of the old covenant. (CC p. 323)

Cf. S. Kistemaker, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 323; L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 139. Fee disagrees with the suggestion that “by this ‘baptism’ Israel came into some kind of relation with Moses.” Fee claims that Paul is concerned about the Corinthians’ relationship to Christ, not to Moses (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 445, n. 19). But while that is certainly Paul’s chief concern, the present context dealing with Israel’s salvation history also needs to be taken seriously. En route to his final goal, Paul has important things to say about Israel’s relationship to Moses. Fee’s comment does not do justice to the clear import of 1 Cor 10:2a. He also overlooks Ex 14:31. L. Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 139, provides a more balanced statement: “They were united to him [Moses], though we should not press this, for no other union can be anything like as close as that between Christians and Christ.” The type is not as great as the antitype. But we should not detract from the importance and reality of the OT types for the OT believers, not should we disregard their significance for us Christians today, as Paul stresses in 1 Cor 10:1, 6, 11. (CC p. 323)

(Later Paul will describe how not all responded with or remained in this trusting faith.) Accordingly Moses was a type of Jesus Christ, the greater mediator of the new covenant, into whom the Corinthian Christians had been baptized (1 Cor 1:13–17; 12:13). (CC pp. 323–324)

ἐβαπτίσθησαν—A number of manuscripts, including the Majority Text, read the aorist middle ἐβαπτίσαντο, which could mean that the Israelites “baptized themselves” or “got themselves baptized.” Because of the difficulty of explaining how this variant arose if it were not original, Metzger, Fee, and others accept it as original. In favor of the aorist passive is its common use for Christian Baptism, including in 1 Corinthians (1:13, 15; 12:13; also Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; and often in Acts) and the preponderance of the textual evidence. BDF § 317, rejects the middle as “spurious.” The passive points to the divine initiative. *God* baptized the people into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (CC p. 321)

10:3–4 *spiritual food ... spiritual drink.* The manna and the water from the rock are used as figures representing the spiritual sustenance that God continually provides for his people (Ex 16:2–36; 17:1–7; Nu 20:2–11; 21:16). (CSB)

Food and drink from God, i.e., manna (Ex 16) and water from the rock (Ex 17:1–7; Nu 20:10–13). (TLSB)

spiritual – πνευματικόν—A variety of translations have been suggested for this adjective, which is translated above as “spiritual.” The summary in R. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, 225–31, includes six main suggestions, from which the following are adapted. (1) A few scholars treat πνευματικός as synonymous with “sacramental,” but “there appears to be no parallel NT example where πνευματικός should be translated ‘sacramental.’” (2) “Intended for the (human) spirit” suggests that the food and drink strengthened the spirit or inner life of the recipients. God’s provision evoked Israel’s praise and strengthened their faith in his guidance and care for them. (3) “Wonderful” suggests that the adjective is an epithet of excellence similar to the English words “celestial,” “heavenly,” or “divine.” (4) “Supernatural” emphasizes that the manna and the water from the rock were provided by God supernaturally and miraculously. NEB REB and RSV translate the adjective as “supernatural.” (5) “Spiritual” or “with a spiritual background” is related to “supernatural” but has in view the miraculous provision of sustenance as part of Israel’s larger history under God. The events were not natural, earthly events but were freighted with “spiritual,” theological significance in the history of God’s redemption of his people. (6) “Figurative” expresses the significance of the food and drink given Israel by God as figures, types, signs, or prophecies pointing to the later NT sacraments given by God to the church. (CC pp. 321-322)

Of these suggestions, “spiritual” is most preferable and is the choice of NIV and NRSV among others. It is literally correct and preserves the connection with the Holy Spirit, a link that is particularly evident in 1 Cor 2:10–15 and 12:1–13. See further the section “The Significance of 10:1–5 for the Church’s Sacramental Theology and Practice” in the commentary below. (CC pp. 321-322)

Just as all the fathers of Israel received a type of Baptism, so they also received a type of the Lord’s Supper. All of them were sustained by the manna, described by the psalmist as the “grain of heaven,” the “bread of angels” (Ps 78:24–25; the Vulgate’s translation of LXX Ps 77:24–25 is “panem caeli ... panem angelorum”), which the Lord “rained ... on them to eat” (Ps 78:24; cf. Ex 16:4, 35). Its heavenly origin explains Paul’s designation of the manna as “spiritual food” (1 Cor 10:3). It was superior to ordinary bread, just as the “spiritual body” with which the believer will be clothed in the resurrection is superior to the natural body (15:42–44). (CC p. 324)

Käsemann asserts that “βρῶμα and πόμα πνευματικόν undoubtedly mean ‘food and drink which convey pneuma’ ” (“The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague [London: SCM, 1964] 113). Cf. R. Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*, 38–39. Käsemann’s bold assertion may be going too far,

not because it places an un-Pauline emphasis on the sacraments (the concern expressed by G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 447, n. 31), but because to say that the manna and water consumed by Israel actually conveyed the Spirit may outrun the biblical evidence. Again, the antitype is greater than the type. The manna may be called “spiritual” simply because of its heavenly origin. Cf. E. Schweizer, “πνεῦμα, πνευματικός,” *TDNT* 6:437. (CC p. 324)

10:4 *drink...drank* – ἔπιον ... ἔπινον—The first verb, in the aorist tense, simply indicates a fact (“they drank”); the second verb, in the imperfect, portrays “the manner of the action” as “being in progress” over a period of time (BDF § 327): “they were drinking.” The period of time would be the forty years during which Israel wandered in the wilderness. See further the commentary below. (CC p. 322)

spiritual Rock – In Jewish tradition, the wisdom from God continuously supplied water to the Israelites through a single rock, which traveled with them. Paul uses this image of God’s faithful provision to heighten the shock at the faithlessness of Israel. (TLSB)

the Rock was Christ. The rock, from which the water came, and the manna were symbolic of supernatural sustenance through Christ, the bread of life and the water of life (Jn 4:14; 6:30–35). (CSB)

Paul, who describes Christ as the wisdom from God (1:30), equates Christ with this rock. Therefore, the Israelites had the benefit of being served by Christ, yet even they were not preserved against perishing (10:5). It is a warning to the Corinthians to watch out lest the same happen to them. (TLSB)

ἐκ πνευματικῆς ἀκολουθούσης πέτρας—Literally, “from the spiritual following rock.” (CC p. 322)

Likewise all the fathers received “the same spiritual drink” (10:4), which was water, but which also corresponds to the wine of the Lord’s Supper.

Compare the prayer of thanksgiving after the Lord’s Supper in Didache 10:3 (*The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, 263; emphasis added): You, almighty Master, created all things for your name’s sake, and gave food and drink to men to enjoy, that they might give you thanks; but to us you have graciously given *spiritual food and drink* [πνευματικὴν τροφὴν καὶ ποτόν], and eternal life through your servant [Christ]. (CC p. 324)

Both at the beginning and at the end of their wilderness wanderings, the Lord provided them with the miraculous water from the rock.

Ex 17:6; Num 20:7–11; Pss 78:20; 105:41; 114:8; Is 48:21. Apparently this was the origin of the charming Jewish legend that a movable well—shaped like a rock and about the size of an oven or beehive—used to accompany the Israelites up hill and down dale on their wanderings, supplying all their needs for water and performing other marvelous services. Paul may have been familiar with this legend, but he does not refer to it directly. Cf. E. E. Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*, 67. On page 69 Ellis cites S. R. Driver:

St Paul views the water which the Israelites drank in the wilderness as provided for them by Christ, in His preexistent Divine nature, who attended and watched over His people,

whom he represents under the figure of a rock, accompanying them through their journeyings. The particular expression chosen by the apostle may have been *suggested* to him by his acquaintance with the legend current among the Jews; but it is evident that he gives it an entirely different application. (“Notes on Three Passages in St Paul’s Epistles,” *The Expositor*, Third Series, ed. W. R. Nicoll, vol. 9 [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889] 18) (CC p. 324)

Paul points to Christ as the true spiritual rock who accompanied Israel (10:4), ascribing to him the title “the rock,” which the OT ascribes to the Lord (Yahweh) as Israel’s great protector.

Gen 49:24; Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30–31; Pss 18:2, 31; 62:2; 78:35; 89:26; 95:1. R. Hays, *First Corinthians*, 161, suggests that the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 32 may have been one factor that “influenced Paul’s identification of Christ with the rock.” This passage, he notes, is “central to Paul’s thinking in this chapter ... [and] repeatedly ascribes to God the title ‘the Rock’ (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31).” He also notes how the divine Wisdom is said to have provided Israel with water in the wilderness (Wisdom 11:4). He points out Philo’s identification of the rock with the wisdom of God (“the abrupt rock is the wisdom of God,” *Legum Allegoriae*, 2:86 [*The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge, 47]) and suggests that these ideas also may have influenced Paul in his formulation of 1 Cor 1:30 (Christ—the wisdom of God) and 10:4. (CC p. 325)

According to Deuteronomy 32, this rock “found him [Israel] in a desert land. ... He nursed him with honey from a cliff, with oil from flinty rock; curds from the herd, and milk from the flock. ... You drank the blood of grapes as wine” (Deut 32:10, 13–14). Paul’s identification of the rock with Christ “is significant for Christology, as of course is the clear implication of Christ’s pre-existence” (“the rock was Christ,” 1 Cor 10:4). (CC pp. 324-325)

10:5 *God was not pleased with most of them.* In spite of the remarkable privileges given to Israel (vv. 1–4), they failed to obey God, thus incurring his displeasure. Of the adults who came out of Egypt, only Caleb and Joshua were allowed to enter Canaan (Nu 14:22–24, 28–35; Jos 1:1–2). (CSB)

Contrasted with the “all” of vv 1–4. Not all the Israelites were unfaithful; so, too, not all the Corinthians are in danger of losing the prize, only those who destroy the faith of others. (TLSB)

overthrown – κατεστρώθησαν—BAGD 1, defines καταστρώννυμι as “lay low, kill.” In classical and Koine Greek the verb can have that same meaning: “lay low” (LSJ III), that is “to kill.” The verb can also mean “to spread out,” “scatter about” (see LSJ, I and II; LSJ, II, cites Diodorus Siculus, *Historicus*, 14.114: πεδίον νεκρῶν κατεστρώθη, “the plain was strewn with corpses”). As Fee observes, “Surely this is the picture intended here.” Cf. JB “their corpses littered the desert.” Heb 3:17 says “their bodies fell in the wilderness.” The LXX uses the active form of the Greek verb in Num 14:16 when Moses is trying to persuade God not to punish the people, lest the pagan nations say, “He [God] slaughtered [MT טָרַף; LXX: κατέστρωσεν] them in the wilderness.” (CC p. 322)

God’s judgment, which resulted in the death of many Israelites, took place frequently in the journey from Egypt. (TLSB)

10:6 *these things* – ὅποι ἡμῶν—Literally, “types of us.” Modern translations often render “types” either as “warnings” (RSV, JB) or “examples” (NIV, NKJV, Phillips NRSV) In his commentary Fee opts for “warning examples.” These attempts, however, imply that the types only have a

negative, Law-oriented value. None of these translations fully captures the salutary way Paul uses the OT τύποι for the benefit of the church, as Hays observes: “The phrase does not mean—despite many translations—‘warnings for us’. It means ‘types of us’, prefigurations of the *ekklesia*.” See also τυπικῶς in 10:11. (CC p. 328)

The word τύπος derives from τύπτω (“to strike”) and means “the impress made by the blow, what is formed, what leaves its impress, the form-giving form, hence form gen[erally] as outline.” Thus John’s gospel uses it of the “marks” left by the nails in Jesus’ hands and feet (Jn 20:25). It can refer to an image or statue as something that has been formed (LXX Amos 5:26; Acts 7:43). It also refers to the formative influence of one person on another, the “example, pattern” set by the apostles, pastors, or believers. (Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:7; 2 Thess 3:9; 1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet 5:3) In Rom 6:17 Paul uses it of the pattern of Christian teaching. Finally, it is used as a hermeneutical term for OT persons, events, and institutions which foreshadow the great eschatological events of the NT. Thus Adam is explicitly said to be a “type” of Christ (τύπος, Rom 5:14). Similarly David as the “lamp of Israel” prefigures Christ, “the light of the world” (2 Sam 21:17; Jn 8:12). The typological correspondence between key OT persons, events, and institutions, and their NT antitypes points to “the essential similarity in God’s acts” in both judgment and salvation. (CC pp. 328-329)

The first illustration (10:6) refers to the incident that occurred immediately after Israel set out from Sinai. The rabble among them yielded to an intense craving for the meat and fresh vegetables that were plentiful in Egypt, and complained bitterly about the manna. In response, the Lord supplied them with quails but struck many of them with a plague. “So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah (‘the graves of craving’), because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving” (Num 11:4–5, 31–34). (CC p. 332)

The foods which were the objects of their craving were not “evil things” (1 Cor 10:6) in themselves, but they were evil because of their association with the idolatrous land of Egypt, and because the people preferred them over the manna, water, and other provisions God graciously gave them in the wilderness. In craving these things, the people were preferring slavery, idolatry, and impurity to the worship of the true God, when they should have been girding up their loins and setting their hopes fully on the gracious provision God had in store for them (cf. 1 Pet 1:13). Likewise the Corinthians were tempted to crave the conviviality and the meat and other delicacies offered in idol temples. Paul addresses this issue at length in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10:14–33. Such coveting amounted to sin against the Tenth Commandment, “You shall not covet” (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21), and was in itself a form of idolatry, that is, a sin against the First Commandment (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). (CC p. 332)

Not that the events were mere “examples,” but that the Corinthians should learn a lesson from what happened to Israel. Just as the Israelites were unfaithful to God, so now some Corinthians were unfaithful; just as God judged Israel, so God would judge the Corinthians (cf v 11). (TLSB)

might not desire – ἐπιθυμητὰς ... καθὼς κάκεινοι ἐπεθύμησαν—ἐπιθυμία (“craving, desire, greed, covetousness”; cf. Latin *concupiscentia*) is denounced in the LXX version of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21; cf. Rom 7:7–8). James 1:14–15 treats it as the source of other sins. (CC p. 329)

as they did. What Paul has in mind is described in vv. 7–10. (CSB)

10:7 idolaters. Referring to the incident of the golden calf (Ex 32:1–6). The people ate a ritual meal sacrificed to an idol (cf. ch. 8). (CSB)

A summary of the golden calf incident in Ex 32. Just as the Israelites were guilty of participating in worship of false gods and eating with them, so some Corinthians were doing the same (1Co 8). (TLSB)

Coveting could also foster the grosser forms of idolatry. Paul's second illustration (1 Cor 10:7) refers to the golden calf Aaron fashioned from the people's earrings (Exodus 32), in defiance of the First Commandment's prohibition against the construction of images (Ex 20:4–6; Deut 5:8–10). Aaron built an altar before the calf and proclaimed a feast to the Lord. Then the Israelites "offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play" (Ex 32:6). The consequences were disastrous: the Lord came close to wiping out the whole nation in his anger but relented when Moses interceded for the people. However, "about three thousand men of the people fell that day" at the hands of the Levites (Ex 32:28). (CC pp. 332-333)

rose up to play – παίζειν—The Hebrew equivalent פָּנַח can mean "play" in the sense of sexual dalliance (Gen 26:8; 39:14, 17). Paul quotes LXX Ex 32:6, where παίζειν translates פָּנַח. (CC p. 329)

Paul warns the Corinthians against falling into similar idolatry. Just as the Israelites had fallen into the temptation of sitting down and eating in honor of an idol, bringing the Lord's wrath on their heads, so some of the Corinthians were reclining and eating and drinking in an idol's temple (1 Cor 8:10; cf. 10:14–22). This could only have disastrous consequences. (CC p. 333)

10:8 Refers to Israel's joining herself to Baal of Peor (Nu 25:1–9), participating in the worship of this god of the Moabites and engaging in sexual immorality with the prostitute virgins who worshiped this god. (CSB)

In the case of the golden calf, the people's worship degenerated into sexual immorality: "they rose up to play" (Ex 32:6; 1 Cor 10:7). The verb has overtones of sexual play (cf. Gen 26:8; 39:14, 17). Breaking the First Commandment led them also to break the Sixth. (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18; cf. 1 Cor 6:12–20; Rev 2:14, 20) The Corinthians too were guilty of sexual immorality, since they tolerated a gross form of incest in the midst of the congregation (1 Corinthians 5), and some were frequenting prostitutes (6:15–20). Paul had to warn them that the sexually immoral, including adulterers and homosexuals, will not inherit God's kingdom (6:9). (CC p. 333)

sexual immorality – Paul then includes a third illustration, another example of sexual sin (10:8). Just as in the golden calf incident Israel's self-indulgence led to idol worship and from there to fornication, so the pattern was repeated at Shittim in the plains of Moab. The Moabites invited the people to their fertility rites in honor of the Baal of Peor, which resulted in some of the Israelite men having intercourse with Moabite women. The Lord's anger was kindled. He gave instructions that the leaders of the people should be killed and exposed, and sent a plague that left 24,000 more corpses in the wilderness (Num 25:1–18). This incident at the very gates of the Promised Land is referred to a number of times in Scripture (Deut 4:3; Ps 106:28–29; Hos 9:10). Echoing Num 31:16, the book of Revelation blames the teaching of the prophet Balaam for the incident. Balaam advised the Moabite king Balak "to throw an enticement to sin before the Israelites [so as to cause them] to eat meat sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality" (Rev 2:14; cf. Rev 2:20). (CC p. 333)

Paul is warning the Christians in Corinth not to fall into the same trap of idolatry and its attendant immorality. As the true temple of God, with the Spirit of God dwelling within them, their lives

should be characterized by holiness (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19). Sexual sins are uniquely vile because they are sins against one’s own body (6:18). (CC p. 333)

twenty-three thousand.† The Hebrew and Greek (Septuagint) texts of Nu 25:9 have 24,000. It is clear that Paul is not striving for preciseness. He is only speaking approximately. The exact number no doubt was somewhere between these two figures. (CSB)

ἴκοσι τρεῖς χιλιάδες—A negligible number of manuscripts read 24,000, in harmony with Num 25:9. The NA²⁷ editors have included Num 26:62 with Num 25:1, 9 in the marginal readings at this point. By this they are suggesting that a memory lapse may have led Paul to recall the number given in connection with registration of the Levites (“the number of those enrolled was 23,000,” Num 26:62) rather than the number given in the previous chapter in connection with the plague (Num 25:1, 9). See further the commentary below. (CC p. 329)

Many interpreters have been intrigued by the discrepancy between Num 25:9, which states that 24,000 died in the plague, and Paul’s figure of 23,000 in 1 Cor 10:8. A number of scribes were aware of the difficulty and corrected Paul’s figure, but the paucity of these variants probably indicates that the original epistle had 23,000. Among the various attempts at harmonization, the most common is to suggest that both the Numbers text and Paul used round numbers. One intriguing suggestion comes from Godet, who thought Paul might have been following a rabbinical practice (similar to the “forty stripes less one” in 2 Cor 11:24) of reducing a number to avoid the risk of exaggeration. Whatever the explanation may be, the discrepancy between the numbers does not detract from Paul’s point: idolatry and immorality bring down God’s judgment on a massive scale. (CC pp. 333-334)

fell – ἔπεσαν—Cf. BAGDs.v. πίπτω, 2 α β: “*fall* in the relig[ious] or moral sense, *be completely ruined*. ... Also in a less severe sense = *go astray morally*” (cf. Prov 24:16; Rom 14:4). (CC p. 329)

10:9 *put Christ to the test* – μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν—The compound verb is an intensified form of πειράζω. It signifies “willfully put to the test,” “boldly challenge” (cf. Ps 78:18 [LXX 77:18]). An OT example where Israel did this is Ex 17:1–7, with the verb נִסָּה, “to test,” in Ex 17:7. (CC p. 329)

Because the preexistent Christ is active prior to His incarnation (cf 10:4; Jn 1:3), sinning against God is sinning against Christ. The Corinthians also sin against Christ by their behavior (8:12). (TLSB)

Paul’s fourth illustration follows in 1 Cor 10:9. By their impatience and complaining on the way, the Israelites often tested the Lord’s patience to its limits. One of the earliest incidents occurred at the place called Massah (“Testing”) and Meribah (“Quarreling”), because there the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord (Ex 17:7; cf. Ps 78:18). This incident later prompted Moses’ admonition, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah” (Deut 6:16; cf. Mt 4:7). That incident involved water, which God graciously provided to them *in Christ* (1 Cor 10:4). (CC p. 334)

Christ – Χριστόν—κύριον (“Lord”) is the reading of \aleph B and a number of other manuscripts; θεόν (“God”) is the reading in Alexandrinus. But Χριστόν (“Christ”) has broad support, including P⁴⁶ D and the Majority Text, and is the reading that best explains the origin of the others. Metzger explains: “The difficulty of explaining how the ancient Israelites in the wilderness could have tempted Christ prompted some copyists to substitute either the ambiguous

κύριον or the unobjectionable θεόν. Paul’s reference to Christ here is analogous to that in [1 Cor 10:]4.” Osburn has also argued in support of τὸν Χριστόν in “The Text of I Corinthians 10:9.” Gieschen notes that “this same problem can be seen in the text of Jude 5.” (CC p. 329)

were destroyed – ἀπόλλυντο—Cf. Robertson and Plummer: “perished day by day.” The imperfect suggests the judgment occurred over a several-day period. (CC p. 330)

But in 10:9 Paul has in mind another occasion, when God sent “snakes” after Israel tempted the Christ who followed them in the wilderness. As they made the long march around Edom, “the people became impatient on the way, and the people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in this wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this accursed food.’ Then the Lord sent the fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people, and many people from Israel died” (Num 21:4–6). Probably it is significant that this example too involves despising the “spiritual food” (1 Cor 10:3), the manna, and the water which God graciously provided them *in Christ* (10:4). It was a sin against Christ himself. (CC p. 334)

10:10 *nor grumble*. As in Nu 16:41. (CSB)

Complaining about God’s actions, here with reference to Nu 14:1–38. (TLSB)

μηδὲ γογγύζετε—The onomatopoeic words γογγύζω and γογγυσμός occur frequently in the LXX of Exodus and Numbers (translating the verb גָּבַל and the noun גִּבְלוֹתַי) with reference to Israel’s “murmurings” in the wilderness against God and Moses, (E.g., Ex 16:7; 17:3; Num 11:1) and in the NT with reference to the Jews “grumbling” about Jesus. (Lk 5:30; Jn 6:41, 43, 61; 7:12, 32) If Christians learn to do “all things without grumbling,” they will “shine like stars in the world” (Phil 2:14–15; cf. 1 Pet 4:19).

Finally, as his fifth illustration, Paul urges the Corinthians not to follow Israel’s example in grumbling against the Lord and Moses (10:10). Grumbling is a recurrent theme in the wilderness accounts. (E.g., Ex 16:2; 17:2–3; Num 11:1–6; 14:2; 16:41; 21:5) But Paul has in mind a specific incident. Some commentators believe it is Numbers 14, after the spies returned from Canaan, and the people refused to trust that the Lord would enable them to conquer the Promised Land. The whole congregation raised an outcry against Moses and Aaron, and the Lord pronounced the judgment: “Your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness” (Num 14:29; cf. 14:16). It was to this judgment that Paul referred in 1 Cor 10:5. However, the reference to “the Destroyer” (10:10) leads others to conclude that uppermost in Paul’s mind is the Numbers 16 account of the earth swallowing up Korah and company. Again this was in response to complaints against Moses and Aaron (Num 16:3, 41). Numbers 16 does not refer to the Destroyer (מַחְרָב, as in Ex 12:23), but in its recounting of the story, the book of Wisdom attributed the ensuing plague to “the Destroyer,” the angel of destruction (Wisdom 18:25). If the Christians in Corinth persisted in grumbling against the apostolic authority of Paul and his colleagues, they ran the risk of suffering the same destruction.

Gieschen has demonstrated in detail that Paul probably “understood ‘Christ’ (10:9) to be the agent of punishment against Israel’s disobedience and against the disobedience of the church in his [Paul’s] day.” Gieschen’s argument is developed against the background of an extensive treatment of the OT and apocryphal “angelomorphic Christology” (the appearance of the Lord in the form of an angel). Within the NT he points to Jude 5, where according to the more difficult reading “Jesus delivered his people from Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe,” and the picture of Christ as the Destroying Angel in Rev 19:11–16 (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 325–29). (CC p. 335)

For the church today, the equivalent grumbling would be to question and even to rebel against the authority of the sacred Scriptures, or against the church's ministers who faithfully proclaim and live by the Scriptures. (CC pp. 334-335)

Korah's specific sin was to claim that all the Israelites were just as holy as Moses and Aaron, and that by carrying out their prophetic and priestly calls Moses and Aaron were exalting themselves over the congregation (Num 16:3). In modern terms, Korah claimed that the priesthood of all believers makes the pastoral office unnecessary and that anyone could assume the pastoral office even without a divine call (see Num 16:10). (CC p. 335)

destroying angel. Paul links the angel who brought the plague of Nu 16:46–50—because of the grumbling of the Israelites against Moses and Aaron (Nu 16:41)—with the destroying angel of Ex 12:23. (CSB)

τοῦ ὀλοθρευτοῦ—Paul has in mind the destroying angel of Ex 12:23 (MT תִּיהַיְרָגֶנּוּ; LXX ὁ ὀλεθρεύων; cf. Heb 11:28); 2 Sam 24:16 (LXX ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ διαφθείρων); 1 Chr 21:12 (LXX: ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐξολεθρεύων); 1 Chr 21:15; and Wisdom 18:25 (LXX: ὁ ὀλεθρεύων). This is the only occurrence of ὀλοθρευτής in biblical Greek. (CC p. 330)

10:11 *these things* – τυπικῶς—Literally, the adverb means “typologically.” See the textual note on τύπος in 1 Cor 10:6. According to Fee, the adverb “does not mean ‘typologically’ here, as the following phrase ... indicates.” Fee’s interpretation depends on seeing δέ as “slightly adversative, contrasting what happened to them and what was written for our warning.” But that involves taking τυπικῶς in a different sense from τύποι in 10:6, which seems unlikely in the context. Paul’s hermeneutic in interpreting the OT remains consistent throughout 1 Corinthians 10. (CC p. 330)

After recounting these five episodes from Israel’s years in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:6–10) that resulted in the people’s corpses littering the landscape (10:5), Paul sums up: All these disasters happened to Israelites “typologically,” “as a prefiguration” (10:11) of the way God deals with his people in both judgment and salvation. These events were recorded not just for Israel’s sake but “for our instruction” (10:11; cf. Rom 15:4). We now live “in the last days” (Acts 2:17), indeed “the last hour” of this world (1 Jn 2:18). All the “ages” of this universe, all the different epochs, have by God’s gracious provision reached their common “goals” (1 Cor 10:11), their consummation in Jesus’ death and resurrection (Heb 9:26), which inaugurated these last days so freighted with significance. Now we live constantly in the shadow of the last great day, the day of his final coming. (CC p. 335)

The Corinthians are to learn from the negative example of the Israelites (cf v 6). (TLSB)

happened – συνέβαινε—The imperfect accents the continuing narrative of the events that *happened* to Israel throughout her history. There is a great deal of repetition in that history, as God continued to be gracious, many of the people kept rebelling, and God’s many acts of judgment failed to bring many of the stiff-necked people to repentance. (CC p. 330)

written down for our instruction – νοουθεσίαν—See the textual note on νοουθετέω in 1 Cor 4:14. Paul’s statement here, “for our instruction [νοουθεσίαν],” is virtually the same as his statement in Rom 15:4: “As many things as were written beforehand, were written for our teaching [διδασκαλίαν].” (CC p. 331)

fulfillment of the ages. The period of time inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection and continuing into the future until Christ's second coming and beyond. It is the period of fulfillment when all that God has been doing for his people throughout all previous ages comes to its fruition in the Messiah. (CSB)

Though Israel could only hope for the coming of Christ, the Corinthians had the advantage of living in the last days when God fulfilled His promise of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. (TLSB)

τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων—J. Weiss proposed the translation “the ends of the ages.” He explained the plural “ages” as a reference to both the old aeon and the new, “i.e., the end-point of the first and beginning of the second; this view urges that the earliest Christians believed that the two ages came together during their own lifetimes: *we, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*” BAGD s.v. αἰών, 2 b, on the other hand, suggests that “τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων can perh[aps] be regarded as equal to τέλος αἰώνων ... = *the end of the age(s).*” A less likely interpretation, that τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων means “the (spiritual) revenues of the ages” (see Mt 17:25; Rom 13:7 for the use of τέλος in the sense of “revenue”), is advanced by A. Souter and P. Macpherson. Cf. Morris: “We should then reap the fruits of the experience of those ages.” (CC p. 330)

Most satisfactory, however, is the view advanced by Delling: “In 1 C[or]. 10:11 the context ... suggests that τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων refers more precisely to ‘the aims of the times.’ “ That is reflected in the translation above as “the *goals* of the ages.” Delling continues: “Of these times an especially prominent one was the wilderness age of Israel ([1 Cor 10:]1–10). They find fulfilment in the present events determined by Christ.” He notes that in contrast with Greek sayings about the τέλος of men, the NT sayings “do not set man in the centre.” In Rom 10:4, while interpreting Israel's history, Paul says that “the goal [τέλος] of the Torah [νόμου] is Christ.” (CC p. 331)

10:12 stands...fall – ὥστε ὁ δοκῶν ἐστάναι βλεπέτω μὴ πέση—The Greek uses the masculine definite article and the corresponding masculine participle, followed by two third person singular verbs. There is no warrant for the change to second person (“so if you think you are standing ...”) in NRSV and REB (CC p. 331)

Mindful of this, the Corinthians should not be complacent and arrogant (1 Cor 10:12). Paul would later warn the Christians in Rome that since unbelief caused the natural branches (most Jewish people) to be broken off from the olive tree, how much more should Gentile Christians—wild branches grafted in—remain repentant, lest they too be broken off from the olive tree of the church. It was only by humble faith in Christ that they continued to stand. So he urges, “Do not be arrogant, but be afraid” (Rom 11:20 NIV Paul's concern reflects the biblical maxim “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18 NIV). Likewise those Corinthian Christians who prided themselves on their power and freedom in the Spirit should be careful not to fall from grace. (CC pp. 335-336)

Misplaced confidence in one's own strength. *fall*. Into sin and away from God. (TLSB)

10:13 temptation. Temptation in itself is not sin. Jesus was tempted (Mt 4:1–11). Yielding to the temptation is sin. (CSB)

ἐῴληφεν—Cf. BAGD s.v. λαμβάνω, 1 c: “esp[ecially] of feelings, emotions *seize, come upon* τινά *someone.*” (CC p. 331)

man – *νθρώπινος*—Cf. BAGD s.v. *ἄνθρωπος*, 1: “a temptation common to man ... i.e., bearable.” BAGD cites Pollux 3, 27, 131, who “also mentions among the concepts which form a contrast to *ὃ οὐκ ἄν τις ὑπομένειεν* [‘which no one could endure’], the expr[ession] *τὸ ἀνθρώπινον* [‘what is human’].” According to Jeremias, *ἄνθρωπος* in 10:13 “does not refer to the origin of temptation (i.e., its derivation from man, which would be contrary to v. 13b), but to its puny strength, i.e., that it may be borne by the weakness of human nature.” It is the kind of temptation that humanity is commonly called on to endure. (CC p. 331)

Having sounded a warning against the dangers of complacency and pride, the apostle hastens to add a corresponding word of encouragement. The Corinthians will not be tested beyond their God-given capacity. The temptations they will encounter are the trials “common to humanity” (1 Cor 10:13), trials to which all sinners are susceptible (cf. Gal 6:1). In each of Paul’s five OT examples in 1 Cor 10:6–10, many Israelites fell, but God in his grace always kept some from falling, and God desired and tried hard to save all. Those who fell were the ones who spurned God’s Word and promises, but nevertheless God remains true to his promises (1 Cor 1:9). As the psalmist expresses it, “By the Lord the steps of a man are made secure, and then he [God] delights in his path; though he [a man] fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord is the stay of his hand” (Ps 37:23–24). Faced with these trials the Corinthians can count on God’s faithfulness (1 Cor 10:13); he will keep them from falling (Jude 24). That God remains faithful to his covenant promises stands as an axiom of biblical theology. (Deut 7:9; 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 1:18; 1 Thess 5:24; 2 Thess 3:3; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 10:23; 11:11; 1 Jn 1:9) With every trial he will provide strength to endure “one day at a time,” and he will also in his own good time create the specific “way out” (1 Cor 10:13) that finally brings the trial to an end. “Time passes and much change doth bring And sets a bound to everything.” (CC p. 336)

Those were ordinary human temptations that the Corinthians and the Israelites face; many other Christians have encountered these temptations and have withstood them. Furthermore, God knows our strength and staying power and will not let temptation exceed it. He also supplies encouragement when temptations come, for “he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” The “way out” of temptation is the ability to bear it, or we can bear temptation because God has promised “a way out.” “God has arranged...that we need not fall.” (PBC)

All humans undergo temptation, even those who, like some Corinthians, think that they have special spiritual abilities. (TLSB)

God is faithful – To His covenant promises; cf Dt 7:9; 34:4. (TLSB)

way of escape – *τὴν ἔκβασιν*—Fee notes that many translators and commentators skip the article. However, “the article with this word corresponds with *ὁ πειρασμός* to individualize each: ‘the temptation’ and ‘the way out.’” (CC p. 331)

Because God has promised to remain with His people, we are never left in a losing situation. His grace provides new opportunities for us to be faithful. “ ‘Lead us not into temptation’ ... refers to times when God gives us power and strength to resist the temptation [1 Corinthians 10:13]. However, the temptation is not taken away or removed. While we live in the flesh and have the devil around us, no one can escape his temptation and lures. It can only mean that we must endure trials—indeed, be engulfed in them [2 Timothy 2:3]. But we say this prayer so that we may not fall and be drowned in them. To feel temptation is, therefore, a far different thing from consenting or yielding to it” (LC III 106–7). See SC, Lord’s Prayer, pp xxxviii–xxxix. (TLSB)

endure *it*. Through God’s enablement to resist the temptation to sin. (CSB)

10:14 *my beloved*. Direct address to the Corinthians; introduces an application of the argument made in vv 1–13. (TLSB)

As in 4:14, he tempers a strong injunction with words of tender pastoral appeal. The Corinthians are Paul’s “beloved” people (10:14). His great love for them prompts his warnings against idolatry. If they recline in an idol’s temple, they have rushed headlong into idolatry. In a previous epistle Paul had counseled them to have nothing to do with an idolatrous person who called himself a “brother” (5:9–11). Idolaters and other unrighteous people will not inherit the kingdom (6:9–10). Rather than dallying with this sin, the Corinthians must flee from it, as they must flee from sexual immorality (6:18; cf. Gen 39:12; 1 Jn 5:21). (CC)

flee from idolatry. Like that described in Ex 32:1–6. Corinthian Christians had come out of a background of paganism. Temples for the worship of Apollo, Asclepius, Demeter, Aphrodite and other pagan gods and goddesses were seen daily by the Corinthians as they engaged in the activities of everyday life. The worship of Aphrodite, with its many sacred prostitutes, was a particularly strong temptation. (CSB)

Tertullian: “Reflect on what a thicket [idolatry] is, and how many thorns lie hid in it. Nothing must be given to an idol, and so nothing must be taken from one” (*ANF* 3:99). Cf 6:18. (TLSB)

10:15 *sensible people; judge for yourselves*. Paul appeals to the commonsense reasoning of the Corinthians in the following argument, rather than the example of Israel (as in vv 1–13). (TLSB)

There is probably some gentle irony in Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians as “sensible people” (1 Cor 10:15). No doubt those in the “puffed up” segment of the congregation that prided itself on its “knowledge” (8:1, 7, 10, 11) thought they had a common-sense approach to idol-meats. If, then, they would maintain their claim to be “sensible” (φρόνιμος, 10:15, as also in 4:10), they should be able to assess what Paul is saying about the dangers of idolatry. (CC)

10:16-17 “If you think that you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (v 12). We stand on much firmer ground when we are an active part of the one body of Christ, living in close fellowship with him and partaking often of his body and blood. Our fellowship together in worship, particularly at the Lord’s Table, strengthens our bond as partners in the Gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear” (v 13). But we need to take advantage of every opportunity to be strengthened in our faithfulness. This occurs through Christ’s presence and power in the Lord’s Supper, through the grace and guidance of his word and Spirit, and through the support and encouragement of our fellow members of the body of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

“Flee from idolatry” (v 14). Many of the Corinthian Christians had come from pagan backgrounds. They were surrounded by temples dedicated to the Greek gods, including Aphrodite with her temple prostitutes. They were also under pressure to join pagan feasts where food was served that had been dedicated to idols. That is the main concern of chapters 8–10. Paul reminds them that they dare not abuse their Christian freedom by doing something that might cause offence to someone with a weak conscience. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (10:31). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

10:16 *cup of blessing*. One of the cups drunk at the Jewish Passover, at which time the Lord's Supper was instituted (Mt 26:17–30; Mk 14:12–26; Lk 22:7–23). (CSB)

Describes consecration of the eucharistic elements. Just: “There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen.... And this food is called among us ... [the Eucharist]” (ANF 1:185). (TLSB)

The argument Paul proposes for the Corinthians' evaluation begins with two rhetorical questions in 10:16. “Is it not the case,” he argues, “that your reception of the sacramental cup and bread establishes an intimate fellowship and communion with Christ? If so, how can this fellowship be compatible with participation in pagan festivals?” (CC)

“Cup” (*potērion*, v 16): Four cups of wine were passed around the table at the Passover meal. The third was known as the “cup of blessing,” and this was the cup Christ used to institute the Lord's Supper. Jesus did not drink the fourth cup, postponing it instead until the heavenly consummation (Matt 26:29). Here St. Paul calls the communion cup the “cup of blessing” (NIV translates *eulogia* as “thanksgiving”). When we receive it, we receive one of our Lord's most precious blessings: his blood shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins, “for which we give thanks” (v 16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

The rhetorical questions of 10:16 are based on the Words of Institution of the Lord's Supper (11:23–25) and must be interpreted in that light. Paul is appealing to what they know from their Communion practice. (CC)

“The cup of blessing” (10:16) was the cup that concluded a Jewish meal. A prayer of thanksgiving was spoken over the cup. Those prayers began, “Blessed are you, O Lord,” and were followed by the reason for the thanksgiving. But more significant than the cup of blessing at normal meals was the third cup of the Passover meal, which was also known as “the cup of blessing.” Most likely it was this cup that Jesus used when he first instituted the Lord's Supper. (CC)

In 10:16 the phrase ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν (“that we bless” or “for which we give thanks”) marks this cup as something distinctive from all other cups. For this cup we are especially thankful, because through it we are blessed by receiving the blood of Christ. (CC)

bread that we break - “Loaf” (*artos*, v 16): As we share the broken bread in the Lord's Supper, we share the body of our Lord which was broken for us on the cross in order to heal the brokenness of our sin and our alienation from God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

participation in the blood of Christ.† By a mysterious sacramental union partakers of the Lord's Supper receive the blood (and body) of Christ. Through this sacrament (and baptism and the word) the Holy Spirit produces, sustains and increases the faith of believers. (CSB)

Gk *koinonia*. Difficult to render with a single Eng word, it is fellowship with both a heavenly and earthly dimension. The Sacrament unites the participants both to Christ's eucharistic body and

blood as well as to their fellow participants. By receiving Christ in this meal, we receive His body and blood and the benefits of the sacrifice of His body and blood, foremost among them the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness through Christ unites the participants in the Body of Christ (cf v 17; 12:27) (TLSB)

“Participation” (*koinōnia*, v 16): When we partake of the cup and loaf in Holy Communion, we are participating in or sharing the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we participate in his banquet feast, we are sharing a foretaste of heaven here on earth. *Koinōia* is often translated “fellowship,” but “communion” captures the sacramental connection better. Our Christian fellowship begins with faith in Jesus Christ. That fellowship is strengthened and renewed through God’s Word and Supper. Fellowship with Christ creates fellowship with the other members of the body of Christ. We live out our fellowship together through our care for each other and our mutual ministry of sharing the Gospel of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

blood ... body. More is happening than merely an earthly union among believers (the “Body of Christ”). Because Christ’s actual body and blood are received, this must also refer to sacramental union with Christ. “Christ’s body and blood are received with the bread and wine, not only spiritually through faith, but also orally. Yet not in a ‘Capernaite’ way, but in a supernatural, heavenly way, because of the sacramental union. Christ’s words clearly show this, when Christ gives direction to take, eat, and drink, as was also done by the apostles. For it is written in Mark 14:23, ‘And they all drank of it.’ St. Paul likewise says [in 1 Corinthians 10:16], ‘The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?’ That is to say: He who eats this bread eats Christ’s body, which also the chief ancient teachers of the Church—Chrysostom, Cyprian, Leo I, Gregory, Ambrose, Augustine —unanimously testify” (FC Ep VII 15).

It is the cup and the bread—“not our faith, not the celebration as an act”—that constitutes “the communion or participation of the body and blood of Christ.” What is the nature of this communion? The word “communion” (κοινωνία) here in 10:16 bears its basic sense of “sharing with someone in something.” Together with their fellow believers, the Corinthians share in the gifts of the Lord’s Supper. What is shared is a true communion in Christ’s gifts. These gifts are the Lord’s body and blood. (CC)

Paul does not mean that the believer merely realizes afresh the benefits of the Lord’s sacrifice of his body and blood, as though the actual body and blood were far removed from us. Just as the very concrete gifts of charity for the poor saints in Jerusalem are called a κοινωνία (“sharing, fellowship, communion,” Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4), so here Paul is not talking about fellowship as “warm fuzzy” feelings. Rather, *through the sacramental bread and wine there is direct oral reception of the Lord’s crucified and glorified body and blood.* (CC)

Further evidence for this literal interpretation is furnished by Paul’s use of the verb μετέχω (“to share, partake”) as a parallel to κοινωνία, “communion,” and κοινωνός, “communicant,” in 10:16–21. Some of the church fathers were alert to the significance of the parallel. Basil explained κοινωνία (“communion”) in this passage as μετάληψις (“partaking, receiving”), and Chrysostom explained it as μετοχή (“participation”). Another parallel to κοινωνία, “communion,” and μετέχω, “to share, partake,” is πίνω, “to drink,” which Paul employs in 10:21. This is literal language, not metaphorical. (CC)

Thus the participation in Christ's body and blood takes place orally, by taking, eating, and drinking these holy things (10:17, 21). By this means the Christian receives the benefits of the new covenant (11:25), namely, the forgiveness of sins—for which Christ gave his body and shed his blood—and life and salvation. (CC)

10:16-17 “Body” (*sōma*, vv 16–17): There is a two-fold meaning to “body” in this text. In Holy Communion, Christ shares his body and blood with us to strengthen our bond with him. At the same time, as we share the one loaf and one cup, we are bonded together in the fellowship of the one body of Christ, united in our common faith and mission. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 2)

10:17 *one bread*. † The act of many believers partaking of one loaf of bread proclaims the unity of the body of Christ, the church, which is nourished by the one bread of life (see Jn 6:33–58). Thus the participants should be united in doctrine. (CSB)

Union with Christ results in union with one another. The symbol of sharing “one bread” corresponds to the reality of the “one body.” This unity is emphasized in particular because of the actions of some in Corinth, who were destroying the faith of those “for whom Christ died” (8:11). Cyril of Alexandria: “Who has doubted that Christ is in this manner a vine, and we the branches, deriving life for ourselves from this?... We must consider that Christ is in us not only according to the habit, which we call love, but also by natural participation” (Ap X 56). (TLSB)

Because all Christians partake of one loaf, which conveys one sacramental body, “we the many” (10:17) are built up as the one mystical body of Christ, the Christian church. “The sacramental body ‘bodies’ together the ecclesiastical ‘body.’ ” Indeed, through our physical reception of the Lord’s crucified and risen body in his sacramental bread we become one body with him and with one another in the communion of saints (10:17; cf. 6:15–17 and Eph 3:6). An early church order, the *Didache*, reflects Paul’s words in its eucharistic prayer (9:4): “As this broken bread was scattered upon the hills, and was gathered together and made one, so let thy Church be gathered together into thy kingdom from the ends of the earth.” (CC)

Chrysostom reflects Paul even more closely:

What is the bread? The body of Christ. And what do they become who partake of it? The body of Christ: not many bodies, but one body. For as the bread consisting of many grains is made one, so that the grains nowhere appear; they exist indeed, but their difference is not seen by reason of their conjunction; so we are conjoined both with each other and with Christ: there being, not one body for thee, and another for thy neighbor to be nourished by, but the very same for all. ... Now if we are all nourished by the same and all become the same, why do we not also show forth the same love? (CC)

partake. Eating the sacramental meal. (TLSB)

10:18 *who who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar*. When the people of Israel ate part of the sacrifice made at the altar (Lev 7:15; 8:31; Dt 12:17–18), they participated in the worship of God, who established the sacrifices and whose altar it was. Likewise when the pagans sacrificed, they did so to demons (vv. 20–21). Paul denies that the idol is anything, i.e., that it is a real deity (v. 19). Nor is a sacrifice offered to a so-called god anything, because the idol is nothing and the god being worshiped is no god at all. In reality, demons (not gods) were the objects of idol worship. God’s people are warned that if they do eat meat sacrificed to idols, they should not eat it with pagans in their temple feasts, for to do so is to become “participants with demons” (v. 20). (CSB)

Cf Dt 14:22–27, where the food tithe was eaten following its sacrifice. By participating in this meal, the Israelites participated in worship of Yahweh. This parallels what some Corinthians were doing when they participated in the rituals where food was sacrificed to idols, which made them participants in the worship of that idol (v 20). (TLSB)

Using another imperative in 10:18, “consider” (cf. the imperatives in 10:14–15), Paul continues his diatribe against the Corinthians’ flirtation with idolatry. He takes as his example “Israel according to the flesh,” the Jewish nation as distinguished from spiritual Israel, the Christian church, consisting of both Jewish and Gentile believers (Rom 9:6; Gal 6:16; Phil 3:3). Anyone familiar with the OT sacrificial practices knew that those who ate the sacrifices were partners of the altar. When priests, Levites, and other Israelites consumed their allotted portions of the sacrificial animals, they entered into a close relationship with the altar and all it represented. The altar was the focal point for communion between God and people, and for the reception of divine gifts. In Mt 23:16–22 Jesus argues for the inseparable connection between the sanctified gifts on the altar, the altar itself, the temple, the throne of God, and the One seated on the throne. The vertical dimension is paramount. That the Corinthians’ relationship to the supernatural—to demons and to God—is Paul’s chief concern is spelled out by the succeeding verses (1 Cor 10:20–21). Above all, the Corinthians are not to tempt the Lord (10:22; cf. 10:9). (CC)

10:19 *idols is anything* – Pagans are united with their gods through their worship, though such worship can look for no blessings from their gods. Idols do not really exist; they are only creations of man’s imagination. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 8:4). (PBC)

Paul hastens to correct a possible misunderstanding (10:19). In sounding these warnings against communion with idols, he is not retracting from his position that “there is no idol in the world” and “there is no God but one” (8:4). He maintains that there is no reality to an idol sacrifice—it is simply ordinary meat—and no reality to an idol constructed of wood or metal. Both are shams. However, as he will explain in 10:20, there is a sinister reality lurking behind them both. (CC)

10:20 *offer to demons* – Though idols are nothing, idolatry is a system under the dominion of evil spirits; and they are the objects worshiped by idolaters. (Concordia Bible)

Paul then addresses them in a fatherly way: “I do not want you to be communicants [κοινωνούς] of the demons” (1 Cor 10:20). Such an “unholy communion” is incompatible with their holy communion in Christ’s body and blood (10:16). There is no room for neutrality. Association with evil spirits would be a renewed bondage robbing them of their newly found freedom in Christ (Gal 4:8–9). (CC)

The devils who planted idolatry in man’s mind are real. They are behind the beings that idol-worshippers actually fellowship with in idol-worship. (PBC)

Participants with demons. Participating in worship of false gods and eating the food from the sacrifice as if they were present makes the false god real by those placing themselves under their influence. Their participation in these meals, regardless of their theological position, indicated their acceptance of what took place at the altar. (TLSB)

10:21 *cup...table of the Lord.* Because the corporate worship of the Christian community reaches its high point in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Paul uses the objects associated with the Sacrament to refer to the worship of the true God. (TLSB)

you cannot drink cup of the Lord and the cup of demons – Should they join with idolaters, they would rebel against the Lord, and provoke Him to come out in judgment against them. (Concordia Bible)

A command. One who worships the true God cannot also worship a false god. By eating at one altar, participants identify themselves with the worship that takes place there. As one cannot worship both the true God and a false god, neither can one participate in the rites of both. (TLSB)

Many Christians are in danger of overestimating their spiritual strength and capacity. Paul makes it clear that it is beyond the Corinthians' power to participate in the Lord's cup and Table as well as the cup and table of demons. Between the Christian celebration and demonic rites there is no neutral, middle ground. Christian people cannot "have it both ways": participation in the Christian sacraments precludes participation in or compromise with any other religious rites or organizations. As Paul expresses it in 2 Corinthians:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? (2 Cor 6:14–16 NIV) (CC)

As the OT prophets ruled out any compromising, syncretistic mix of the worship of Yahweh with the worship of Baal, so Paul lays it down for the Christian church that there is to be no syncretism, no toying with false religions and ideologies, no limping along with two different opinions. Nor should Christians tolerate any false teaching or teachers. Rather, Christians are to turn away from anything that is not in harmony with the Gospel faithfully passed down to them (cf. 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1–3) and shun any purveyors of false doctrine (cf. Rom 16:17–20). (CC)

In contrast to the "infinitely inclusive" pantheon of Greco-Roman religion, the faith of the church, like the faith of ancient Israel, is "radically *exclusive*." (CC)

10:22 *provoke the Lord's jealousy*. By sharing in pagan idolatry and worship (cf. Ex 20:5; Dt 32:21; Ps 78:58). (CSB)

A common OT reference to God's judgment; cf Ex 20:5; Dt 32:15–21, both in the context of the worship of false gods. By not answering "no" to this question and changing their behavior, the Corinthians would face God's anger and wrath. (TLSB)

Persons cannot continue to unite with the wicked in the service of Satan, and yet be the friends of God; and those who seek their chief enjoyment in sensual gratification, are provoking the Lord to destroy them. (Concordia Bible)

10:1–22 "Flee from idolatry" (v 14) summarizes this section. Even Israel, who had seen God's mighty works throughout the exodus, acted as if God were not real, as if they could rely on gods of their own creation or even themselves to keep them safe. In our age, there are many gods. Some are worshiped as such (e.g., Islam, Hinduism); others subtly become gods (e.g., money, pride). Luth: "A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress" (LC I 2). Our society has many such gods, be they wealth, status, reputation, even family. But the one true God does not tolerate shared allegiance. If we participated in the worship of false gods or in churches that do not faithfully confess the Gospel

in all its purity, this would indicate that we assent to what that worshiping community believes. For this reason, we avoid such false worship. At the Lord's Table, He offers His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and through them creates a faithful community, one committed to Him and to one another. He comes to His people in His Word and in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which forgives sins and creates a Church faithful to Him. • From being led astray by the many gods of this world, protect us by Your Spirit, Lord. Thank You for the gift of Your Son, who comes to us in His body and blood, and for the gift of the congregation in which I hear Your Word proclaimed faithfully and where I receive this life-giving Sacrament. Strengthen me to build up my fellow participants in worship of You. Amen. (TLSB)

Do All to the Glory of God

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. 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.” 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. 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? 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.

10:23-30 Paul has completed his polemic which he began in chapter 8 against the practice of reclining in pagan temples and eating idol-meat. This he has absolutely forbidden as gross idolatry and the worship of demons (1 Cor 10:20–22). But there are further issues on which the Corinthians need the apostle's guidance: (1) What about the meat on sale in the *μάκελλον*, the “food market”? Are they free to buy this and eat it at home? Paul gives his answer in 10:25–26. (2) What should they do when a non-Christian invites them to his home or a public area like the dining rooms near the Lerna fountain (see 10:27–30)? (CC)

The introduction to Paul's final wrapping up of his argument on idol-foods is almost identical to 6:12. There, too, in his argument against consorting with prostitutes and other sexual sins, he twice cites the slogan “all things are in my power.” This slogan was, no doubt, asserted by the Christians who (as Paul would imply later) claimed to have superior “knowledge” (*γνώσις*, 8:1, 7, 10, 11). And exactly as in 6:12, Paul's first qualification in 10:23 is this: “But not all things are beneficial.” But whereas in 6:12 his second qualification reads “but I for one will not be overpowered by anything,” now his second one is “but not all things *build up*.” This echoes the maxim with which Paul opened his discussion of idol-foods: “Love builds up” (8:1; in both 8:1 and 10:23 the verb is *οικοδομέω*). What it means to be engaged in the loving edification (building up) of the church he spells out in the next verse: “Let no one seek his own [advantage], but that of the other” (10:24). To say the least, eating idol-food in an idol-temple is neither beneficial nor constructive. Idols in themselves are merely wood or stone, and idol-food is merely food, but behind them lurk demons (10:19–21). Such unrestrained exercise of one's “authority, right” (8:9) and Christian “freedom” (10:29) is likely to be a serious stumbling block that causes weak Christians to trip and perish (chapter 8). Furthermore, as Paul has just demonstrated (10:14–22), it is idolatry, the same as Israel's idolatrous rebellion (10:1–13). (CC)

10:23 *not everything is helpful.* Personal freedom and desire for one's rights are not the only considerations. One must also consider "the good of others" (v. 24; cf. 8:1; Gal 6:2). (CSB)

For the benefit of either oneself or others. (TLSB)

The guiding principle must always be what is beneficial to others and constructive, what promotes the congregation's progress and joy in the faith (Phil 1:25). No one should be selfishly preoccupied with his own rights, privileges, and personal satisfaction at the expense of others. Jesus himself had taught and modeled the way of loving service to others (Mt 22:39; Jn 13:1–17; Phil 2:4–11). Paul had high praise for Timothy: "I have no one like him, who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For all [others] seek their own advantage, not that of Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:20–21). Timothy practiced the loving servanthood, the freedom from self-seeking, which Paul expected of all Christians (Rom 15:2; 1 Cor 10:33; 13:5). (CC)

All things which are good to eat, may at proper times be eaten; and even meat which had been offered to idols was not changed, and would not injure Paul: but it would not on that account be right for him to partake of it in idolatrous feasts, because his doing so might injure others. (Concordia Bible)

build up. Returns to a theme expressed in 8:1–3 and developed further in 14:3–5. (TLSB)

10:24 A summary of the argument of chs 8–10; it parallels Jesus' own statements regarding the "greatest commandment" (e.g., Mk 12:28–34, based on Lv 19:18). From this summary, Paul makes application to two specific situations faced in Corinth: meat from a market and eating at a nonbeliever's home. (TLSB)

let no one seek his own good...good of his neighbor – He should not seek his own pleasure or profit only but seek to benefit others as well. (Concordia Bible)

Philippians 2:3-8, "3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

10:25 *Eat anything sold in the meat market.* Even if it has been sacrificed to an idol, because out in the public market it has lost its pagan religious significance. (CSB)

The macellum in Roman cities sold all types of produce and meat. Some of this food would come from farmers or butchers, but some may have come from sacrifices in temples, sold to generate income. The macellum in Corinth was located near several temples, thus raising questions about the source of meat sold there. So long as neither the worship of the idol took place nor its presence was invoked in the act of eating (8:4–6), all food was permitted because it had all been created by God. (TLSB)

Paul now turns to another major issue for the young church in its attitude to food offered to idols: what should their policy be when shopping at the Corinthian food market? Should they pick and choose among the foods and only buy what had not been offered to idols? (CC)

Paul's reply is unambiguous: "You may buy and eat anything. And don't ask fussy questions!" In adopting this attitude, Christians were to be radically different from Jews, who were, indeed, permitted to buy from the μάκελλον, but only after they had investigated whether the food had been sacrificed to idols and whether it had been prepared in accord with the OT regulations about blood and other matters. Thus the followers of "the Way," popularly considered a sect of Judaism (see, for example, Acts 24:14), were to be distinctive from Jews in their practice of Christian freedom. Their freedom was based on a clear recognition that there is no idol in the world, no God but the one Creator of all, and no Lord but Jesus, through whom all things exist (1 Cor 8:4–6). So they should have no scruples and raise no questions "for the sake of conscience" (10:25, 27), because no matter of conscience is involved. (CC)

without raising any question – Questions like whether it may not be the flesh of an animal sacrificed to an idol. For in such a case, though it should be so, you are thereby made in view of men a patron of idolatry. (Concordia Bible)

conscience. God's perspective, not one's personal moral code, should determine whether one eats meat from the macellum. (TLSB)

10:26 *the earth is the Lord's* – A quotation from Ps 24:1 used at Jewish mealtimes as a blessing (cf. Ps 50:12; 89:11).

Paul's attitude is consistent with Jesus, who exercised sovereign freedom toward the OT dietary laws, declaring all foods to be clean (Mk 7:19; cf. Rom 14:14; Gal 2:11–14). In Acts 10:15 and 11:9, the ascended Lord Jesus declared all foods and all peoples—the Gentiles—to be clean: "What God has cleansed, you must not call unclean" (see also Acts 10:28). (CC)

Paul grounds his counsel in the words of Ps 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's and all that fills it" (1 Cor 10:26). The rabbis used this text to support the practice of saying grace at meals. In Ps 50:10–12 we hear a similar affirmation that everything that fills the world—wild animals, cattle, birds, indeed all that moves—is the Lord's (see also Ps 89:11). Thus Paul's strong theology of creation is deeply grounded in the OT. Later it finds ringing reaffirmation in the first epistle to Timothy in connection with the gifts of marriage and food: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:4–5). (CC)

We may therefore use any part of it in such a manner as will honor Him and do good, and we should not desire to use it in any other way. (Concordia Bible)

10:27–30 Even a simple meal with friends and neighbors becomes an opportunity for witness. (TLSB)

10:27 *disposed.* Simply sharing a meal with unbelievers is not a problem, unless the meal involves food sacrificed to idols. (TLSB)

eat whatever is set before you. Whether or not it might be meat sacrificed to idols, ask no questions. As long as the subject has not been brought up, you are free to eat the meat, even if it had been offered to an idol. (CSB)

God's perspective, not conscience, should not be one's guide. Because all food is clean (Mk 7:19), one should not use personal moral judgments to decide whether or not to eat. (TLSB)

The great text from Psalm 24 (“the earth is the Lord’s . . .”) governs both what precedes and what follows in equal measure. On the strength of this word from the Lord, the Christian may eat “*everything* that is on sale in the food market *without asking questions for the sake of conscience*” (1 Cor 10:25). And on the strength of the same word, he may accept an invitation to a pagan home or dining room, and “*everything* set before you eat *without asking questions for the sake of conscience*” (10:27). (CC)

Such social invitations from pagans, however, could place the Christian in an ambiguous situation. While ordinary meals in a pagan home did not always involve food offered in sacrifice, food dedicated to a god was more likely to be served at special family celebrations, to which a Christian might be invited. How, then, should he conduct himself at the meal table? How could he avoid compromising his faith, on the one hand, and being too fussy on the other? (CC)

First, Paul reiterates in 10:27 that Christians are free; he implies that they are under no obligation to follow the OT ceremonial law or Jewish traditions. If they wish to accept a pagan’s invitation, they are free to do so (cf. Acts 10:9–23; 11:2–3). And again in 1 Cor 10:27, as in 10:25, they are not bound to inquire about the origin of the food, “for the earth is the Lord’s” (10:26). (CC)

10:28–29a Someone at the meal makes a connection between idol worship and the food being eaten. (TLSB)

do not eat it. Because others might connect the idol and the food, Christians must not eat the food, lest the others think that eating food sacrificed to their god is acceptable behavior. The reaction of the host, who may be offended, is not indicated here. However, in giving an explanation as to why they do not eat, Christians would have an opportunity to share the Gospel with the unbelievers so that they, too, “may be saved” (v 33). (TLSB)

10:28 *for the sake of the man who told you.* If the meat has been identified as meat sacrificed to idols and you eat it, the man—whether a believer or an unbeliever—might think you condone, or even are willing to participate in, the worship of the idols the meat has been offered to. (CSB)

However, the situation changes if someone points out that the food has been offered in sacrifice (10:28). Out of consideration for this informant and his conscience, the Christian should refrain from eating. Paul does not specify if the informant is the host (motivated either by thoughtful consideration or by a desire to embarrass his Christian guests), a non-Christian fellow-guest, another Christian guest, or a Christian slave waiting on the table.²² Most likely the informant is a Christian, for in 10:25 and 10:27, as in chapter 8 and the parallel discussion in Romans 14, Paul speaks of the conscience of Christians. A Christian brother has somehow learned that the food has been offered to an idol. Out of deference to his host (and perhaps to pagan fellow-guests) he refers to it as food “devoted in sacrifice” (ἱερόθυτος, 1 Cor 10:28) instead of “meat sacrificed to idols” (εἰδωλόθυτος, 8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:19). But once he has drawn attention to the nature of the food, his Christian fellow-guest cannot fail to observe the painful dilemma presented to his conscience. (CC)

Under these circumstances the fellow Christian must leave his meat untouched (10:28). He should do this out of respect for the scruples of the informant, and for the sake of conscience (cf. 8:10–11). While Paul may envision the informant as being a Christian, his principle of making every effort to save as many as possible (9:19–23; 10:32–33) would dictate that the Christian must not eat if doing so would tarnish the Gospel or make it more difficult to gain and save anyone present. This would apply not just to foods, but also to a Christian’s participation in anything that might sully his witness to Christ. (CC)

for the sake of conscience. In eating meat that has publicly been declared to have been sacrificed to idols, you may offend “the other man’s conscience” (v. 29) by causing him to think it is all right to eat meat sacrificed to idols even though he has doubts about it. Or if he is an unbeliever, he may think that the Christian worships both God and a pagan idol. (CSB)

The same action may under some circumstances be right, and under other circumstances be wrong. It is not always enough therefore to look at the action as it is in itself, disconnected from its circumstances, or at its effects on ourselves merely; but we must look also at the impression it will make and the effects it will have on others. (Concordia Bible)

10:29b–30 Objections that may have been raised by the Corinthians. Paul responds in 10:31–11:1. (TLSB)

10:29 *my liberty.* Cf. Ro 14:16. The exercise of one’s personal freedom is to be governed by whether it will bring glory to God, whether it will build up the church of God and whether it will encourage the unsaved to receive Christ as Savior and Lord (vv. 31–33). (CSB)

Paul now specifies in 10:29 that his concern for the conscience is not for one’s own conscience, whether the apostle’s own conscience or that of his Christian readers or hearers. They should not let a weak brother’s overly zealous scruples give them a bad conscience about eating such food. Paul asks: “Why is my freedom judged by another conscience?” (10:29). Christians have no right to judge, nor to restrict the freedom of their brothers who can happily eat anything served up to them by a pagan. Paul’s readers and hearers, for their part, need to be clear in their own minds that their only reason for abstaining is loving sympathy for a “weak” brother (8:7–12; 9:22; cf. Rom 14:22). (CC)

10:30 *partake with thankfulness.* Paul could thank God for meat sacrificed to idols, for the idol is nothing and the meat is a part of God’s created world. (CSB)

When a Christian receives the food that is set before him with thanksgiving, the food is “sanctified by the Word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:3–5; see also Rom 14:6). The Christian practice of saying grace before and after meals testifies that our food and drink are not something we offer to God, but a gift we receive from his hand. No one has the right to criticize a Christian for thankfully receiving the Creator’s gifts. Paul’s words here would have modern application not just to foods, but also to activities that may be condemned—without biblical warrant—by legalistic Christians. (CC)

10:31 *do all to the glory of God.* The all-inclusive principle that governs the discussion in chs. 8–10 is that God should be glorified in everything that is done. (CSB)

Let it be your great object to honor Him, and do the greatest good in your power. (CB)

10:32 *give no offense.* The particular cause of stumbling Paul had in mind was that of eating meat offered to idols (see 8:13). Living to glorify God will result in doing what is beneficial for others, whether Christians (“the church of God”) or non-Christians (“Jews, Greeks”). (CSB)

Not mere “offensive behavior,” but leading fellow members of the Church into sin (8:10–13) or leaving non-Christians in unbelief (10:27–29). (TLSB)

10:33 *please everybody in every way.* Paul does not mean that he will compromise the truths of the gospel in order to please everybody, but that he will consider his fellowman and not cause

anyone's conscience to be offended by his daily life, thus keeping that person from receiving the gospel. (CSB)

Not the people pleasing condemned in Gal 1:10, but sacrificially seeking the good of others. (TLSB)

that they may be saved. The goal that defines Christian behavior toward others—that fellow Christians be built up to salvation and that nonbelievers come to salvation. (TLSB)

11:1 *imitators of me.* Christ is always the preeminent example, yet in the day-to-day living of the Christian life, it is also helpful to have someone close at hand as an example and model. Cf Php 3:17. (TLSB)

Notice the order: (1) Christ is the supreme example (cf. 1Pe 2:21); (2) Christ's apostle follows his example ("as I follow"); (3) we are to follow the apostle's example. (CSB)

10:31–11:1 The summary of whether to eat idol food. Unacceptable situations: in the temple dining rooms (8:7–13), in temple rituals (10:14–22), or when an unbeliever makes a connection between the idol and the food (10:27–29). Acceptable situations: food purchased in the marketplace (10:25–26), in a nonbeliever's home, as long as no connection to an idol is made. The determining factor is how the other person views the food. Showing love to others means deferring one's theologically founded right to eat so as not to mislead them into sin (8:10–12) or leave them thinking that eating sacrificial food is acceptable (10:27–29). To "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39) brings glory to God. (TLSB)

With the word "therefore" (οὖν, 1 Cor 10:31), Paul gathers up the discussion of the last three chapters on idol-meats. He has just shown that anyone who eats his meat thankfully should not be criticized (10:29–30). By partaking of food with thankfulness, he gives glory to God. Paul now extends this principle to the whole of the Christian life: everything—not only eating and drinking but every activity we engage in—is to glorify God and benefit the neighbor (cf. Col 3:17; 1 Pet 4:11). In gratitude for God's mercy, the believer's whole self is to be a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 6:20). (CC)

When that is the Christian's chief concern, he will not cause offense to others. He will not tarnish the Christian faith. Paul specifies three groups: Jews, Greeks, and the church of God (10:32). The first two are non-Christian groups, "those outside" (5:12). Christians are to behave in a becoming fashion toward outsiders (1 Thess 4:12; cf. Col 4:5) in order not to alienate them further from Christianity and salvation. Jews could be alienated by an unseemly exhibition of Christian freedom, Gentiles by a display of legalistic rigor. In adding the third group, "the church of God" (1 Cor 10:32), Paul probably has in mind chiefly the weak brothers who could be led into sin and thereby perish because of the poor example set by other Christians (8:9–12). (CC)

Again (as in chapter 9) the apostle holds himself up as the proper pattern to follow (10:33–11:1). Like his Master, he is not engaged in this ministry in order to please himself. He is not motivated by selfish considerations, but by a concern to provide proper pastoral care and edification to others and to bear their burdens (cf. Rom 15:1–3; Phil 2:4). His sole concern is the salvation of others (see σώζω, "save" in 1 Cor 5:5; 7:16; 9:22; 10:33; 15:2). Thus he strives to please all people, not in the sense of currying favor with them (an idea he emphatically rejects in Gal 1:10 and 1 Thess 2:4), but in the sense of commending the Christian faith to them, profiting them spiritually (cf. his corrections of the Corinthians' slogan in 6:12 and 10:23). The wording "I please all people in all things" (10:33) echoes Paul's motto set forth in 9:20–22: "to all people I have become all things." (CC)

Paul rounds off his discussion by calling on the Corinthians to imitate him in loving self-sacrifice for the sake of their fellow-Christians, a self-sacrifice modeled on Christ crucified (11:1; cf. Rom 15:3; 1 Cor 2:2; 2 Cor 4:11). Imitation of Paul and of the Lord necessarily involves walking in the way of love and the cross. By contrast, the self-indulgent trumpeters of Christian freedom “walk ... as enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:17–19; cf. Eph 5:1–2; 1 Pet 2:21). Thus Paul returns once again to the thesis of his epistle: the word of the cross is foolishness and a stumbling block to selfish, self-confident humanity, but it is God’s hidden power and wisdom unto salvation (1 Cor 1:18–25). The only knowledge that avails before God is knowing Christ crucified (2:2; cf. 8:1), and that knowledge is communicated to others by living in imitation of him (11:1). (CC)

10:23–11:1 In Western culture, Christians rarely have to deal with food sacrificed to other gods, though Christians in Asia and Africa must deal with these issues directly. In either case, Paul’s instructions show that our actions communicate something about who we are to those around us. While called to be faithful to God, we are also called to build up both our fellow Christians and, ultimately, to lead all whom we meet to Christ. Our actions tell others about who we are in Christ, giving us an opportunity to witness to His love in all aspects of our lives. Christians are not forbidden from interacting with those who do not know Christ—far from it. By our actions and words among them we can testify to the one God and what His Son, Jesus Christ, has done for us.

- Forgive my halting and hesitant witness, Lord. Guide me in every situation to “seek to save” others. Amen. (TLSB)