

Group Study Outline

LAUNCHING QUESTION

Imagine you're arriving at the Bramcote Island as a missionary sent from overseas? How will you begin to reach the Bramcotians with the gospel?

RECAP

Use material from p1 of these notes to give some background to the issues

QUESTIONS

READ 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

This paragraph is about eating food somehow connected to a pagan shrine.

What is going on when we eat bread/drink wine in communion?

What was going on when OT Israel feasted after their sacrifices?

What equivalent 'participating' happens when eating food offered to idols?

Why demons? where have they suddenly come from?!

What is the problem for the Christian who 'participates' with demons?

What does it mean to say that God is 'jealous'?

From ch 10, what has Paul already said that a provoked jealous Lord does?

READ 1 Corinthians 10:23-30

This paragraph is about eating food in a home, either your own or a friend's.

What are Paul's reasons why it's OK to eat anything bought at the market?

If I go to an unbeliever's house, should I eat what he serves? always?

What is the principle of v23-24? what is my neighbour's good?

How is that being worked out in the situations of eating/not eating?

APPLICATION

In what ways are we in danger of *a ghetto mentality* – throwing up the barricades to protect us from a wicked world, hiding inside and lobbing a few gospel tracts over the wall?!

In what ways are we in danger of *provoking the Lord* to jealousy – thinking that we can play with fire and yet not 'fall'?

Which of those two dangers do you think you/we are most prone to?

READ 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

How do I glorify God, according to these verses?

What example of Paul and of Jesus have these chapters explained?

Do I think that I am currently following this example?

How will I try to put the example of these chapters into practise?

How can I behave more like a missionary to Bramcote?

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1

1 Corinthians 8-10 at a glance

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a reply to a letter they'd previously sent him (cf 7:1). ch 8-10 is about one of the topics they've raised with him.

Corinth was a city with a huge number of pagan shrines – one on every street corner! So in the city, much money could be made from meat which was needed as a present to be offered to the idols, and afterwards could be sold on in the markets for home use. 10:23 onwards asks whether it is right to buy and eat such meat at home. But earlier in ch 8-10, it's a different issue. It seems as if a lot of meat was served up in pagan temples as a C1st restaurant, where you'd be taken for a business dinner/meal out. And any invite out to dinner would probably be here, eating 'idol food' with connotations that this was part of a sacrificial feast. Should Christians go?

Paul's answer ranges far more widely than this topic alone as he shows that there are far bigger issues at stake: people's salvation matters most!

Theme Sentence for 9:24-10:13

Do everything for the sake of the gospel (9:23)

Context

CONCERN FOR THE SALVATION OF CHRISTIANS (8:1-13)

Whatever the rights or wrongs in this 'idol-food' issue, Paul thinks that there is something far more important than people enforcing their opinion, so that those who disagree end up doing what they believe to be sin. Paul is aghast that these confident Christians are destroying their 'weak' Christian brothers, rather than being more concerned that they are saved.

CONCERN FOR THE SALVATION OF NON-CHRISTIANS (9:1-23)

That passion for others' salvation drives Paul in everything he does. In every situation, and whoever he is with, Paul adapts his behaviour so that cultural baggage won't prevent people being able to hear the message of salvation that he preaches. He wants to see as many as possible saved!

CONCERN FOR MY OWN SALVATION (9:24-10:13)

It's the same concern for people to be saved that will lead Christians to be very careful about our own temptations to sin. We should be more like Paul (who disciplined himself sharply lest he should be 'disqualified') than like Israel (who had every reason to believe they would reach the Promised Land, but were 'overthrown in the wilderness'). We must beware the complacency of presuming we can 'desire evil' and yet also 'not fall' (13).

Commentary

These notes follow the outline of the 26 Jan 2014 sermon at Emmanuel

So is it all right for Christians to eat food offered to idols?
Finally, Paul tells us what he thinks:

meat in the temple: get away from the demon 10:14-22

The command for 'meat in the temple' is 'flee from idolatry' (14). But why?

Christians and the Lord's Supper (16-17)

What happens when Christians share the Lord's Supper is that we participate in the blood/body of Christ. 'Participate' is *koinonia*, the NT word that's normally translated 'fellowship' or 'partnership'. Paul is saying that as we share in the meal, we share in the reality behind it, fellowshiping with Jesus as we, in our minds, rely again on his death for us.

Israel and their sacrifices (18)

It is the same with Israel and the feasts they ate as part of their OT sacrifices: eating food in that context was very different from eating the same food at some other time. Eating it then meant sharing in the reality (of forgiveness or thanksgiving or whatever) that lay behind the sacrifice.

the Corinthians and eating idol meat (19-20)

This is the same thing again: when they eat idol meat (in the pagan shrine), they are sharing in the reality behind it. Although we may know that 'an idol is nothing' (8:4), the hideous reality behind the lump of wood is the smirking face of a real demon. And Christians cannot *koinonia* with demons without angering their jealous Lord. ('Jealousy' here refers to the fact that the one-and-only God looks for exclusive loyalty from his people.)

In the wilderness (10:1-11), Israel did think that they could two-time God, but they were wrong: no-one is strong enough to resist his judgment (22).

meat at home: get out of the ghetto 10:23-30

This paragraph deals with several scenarios, and in each case seeks to apply the principle of 23-24. Whether something is lawful or not is not the only issue. There is also the question of how the salvation of others might best be helped: that's the 'good' of others that Paul is thinking about. And he's going to work that out in the trivial situation of going out to dinner!

when it's fine to eat the meat (25-27)

Since there is only one God (8:4-6), all the earth is his. So, of course, any meat is his meat! So when I buy meat at the market (25), it's fine to eat it (remembering to be always thankful to the Lord who provides it all for us [30]). And that's the same when I'm out for dinner in the house of unbeliever: I should eat any meat that he offers to me, too (27).

The scruples of the 'weak' from ch8 could push Christianity into a ghetto, so that the vegetarian Paul (8:13) would never get invited out to eat meat with any non-Christians. Don't let that happen (or the unbeliever of 27 will never hear the gospel)! This is a very good example of 9:19-23 ... we want to take the gospel to all people in order that as many as possible are saved.

when it's not fine to eat the meat (25-27)

However, there is a caveat to that. If the non-Christian host then explains that there is a connection between this particular meat and a pagan shrine, then we shouldn't eat it. Why not? Because the non-Christian would expect Christians to behave like Jews and refuse idol-sacrificed meat: eating it would disappoint their expectations. We might relish the chance to discuss why Christians feel it's OK to eat it but Jews don't; or why some Christians do, but other Christians don't; or why those Christians who do eat, sometimes do but sometimes don't ...! But the problem is that there'd be no time left to talk about Jesus! So, because we want to put their salvation first, don't hinder the gospel by making an issue of this irrelevant issue.

conclusion: the principle restated 10:31-11:1

By this point, we could be totally confused! The question was: 'can I eat food that's been offered to idols'. And the answer so far has been 'never again', 'certainly not', 'yes definitely' and 'no, better not!'. Sometimes Paul eats and sometimes he doesn't. So Paul ends this section by clarifying for us his always-and-everywhere principle (which is to be applied to 'whatever you do'): do everything for the glory of God.

The problem is: what does it mean to 'glorify God'? So 32-33 spells it out:

no offence

The 'offending' word here is the same as 'stumbling block' (8:9). It's about people encouraged to do what they think is wrong ... and that kind of behaviour is potentially fatal. We must not let what we do cause someone else to end up in hell ... whether that is Jews/non-Jews (9:20-22) or someone within the church of God (8:7-13). It glorifies God when we change any behaviour that might keep anyone out of heaven.

please everyone

doesn't mean making sure that everyone is always happy with me all the time! Obviously! No, but it does mean that we bend and adapt what we are like (even when that costs us) - we 'become like them' - so that as many as possible are saved. It glorifies God when people are saved.

Of course, this was how Paul lived his life and how Jesus lived his life: he put his rights aside, made himself nothing and became like us to win us.