



1. Welcome
2. Worship w/Prayer Board
3. Annc
4. Conscience H.O.

**This we know:**

There was a letter sent previous to 1 Corinthians reply (Could it be 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?).

At the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Paul mentions wanting to pay the Corinthians a THIRD visit...when did the 2<sup>nd</sup> visit happen? (1<sup>st</sup> = Acts 18).

Another very stern letter that Paul wishes he never sent (could it be 2 Corinthians 10-13?).

If it is, we can operate by this time frame:

- i. The 'Previous Letter', which *may* be contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1 (N.B. 6:13 runs very smoothly into 7:2).
- ii. 'Chloe's people' (1 Cor. 1:11\_ bring Paul at Ephesus news of divisions at Corinth.
- iii. 1 Corinthians chapters 1-4 were written in reply and Timothy is about to take it to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17).
- iv. Three men (Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus: 1 Cor. 16:17) arrive with more news and a letter from Corinth: Paul immediately writes chapters 5 and 6 and pens chapters 7-16 in reply to this letter. Timothy then takes the whole of 1 Corinthians to Corinth.
- v. The situation gets worse and Paul makes a disastrous visit to Corinth after which things get even more painful for Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1). He then sends the 'Severe Letter' (2 Cor. 10-13) by the hands of Titus (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13).
- vii. Paul is so worried that he cannot wait for Titus to return; he sets out to meet him in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5-13), and then writes 2 Corinthians 1-9, the 'Letter of Reconciliation'.  
("Message of 1 Corinthians", David Prior, pg. 18. The Bible Speaks Today, IVP 1985)

**Begins to answer the letter that was written to him (Chloe):**

Chpt 7 – Marriage

Chpt 8 – Idols (your freedom causing another to stumble)

Chpt 9 – Give Up your rights, run the race

Chpt 10 – <sup>23</sup> You say, "I am allowed to do anything"<sup>[d]</sup>—but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is beneficial. <sup>24</sup> Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.

Chpt 11 – Public Worship/Lord's Supper

Chpt 12 – Spiritual Gifts

Chpt 13 – Love

Chpt 14 – Tongues, Prophecy, Worship

Chpt 15 – Resurrection of Christ, The Dead, The Body [Teach on Last Things?]

Chpt 16 – Final Greetings

RECAP: Last Week MALACHI

**DIVORCE: Malachi 2** <sup>13</sup> Here is another thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure. <sup>14</sup> You cry out, "Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.

<sup>15</sup> Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his.<sup>[b]</sup> And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. <sup>16</sup> "For I hate divorce!"<sup>[e]</sup> says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,<sup>[d]</sup>" says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."

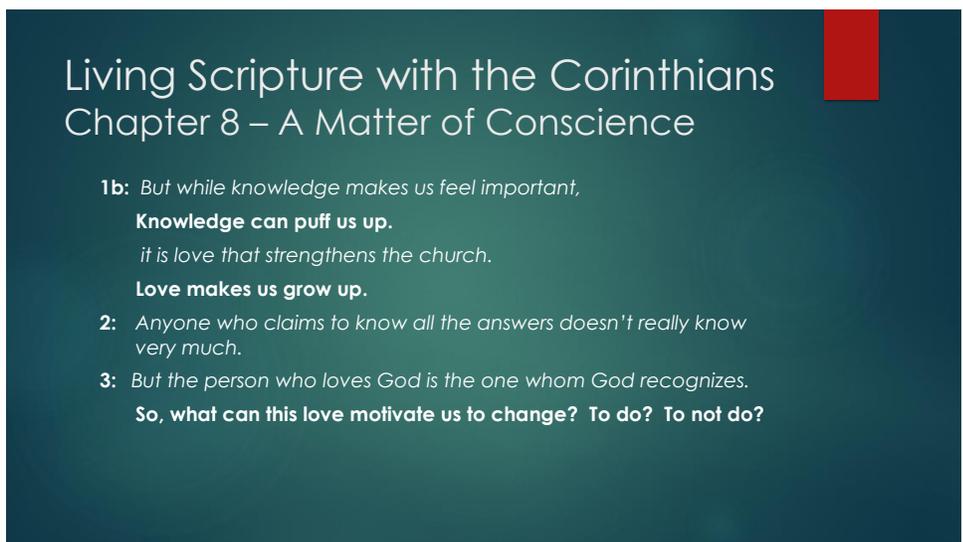
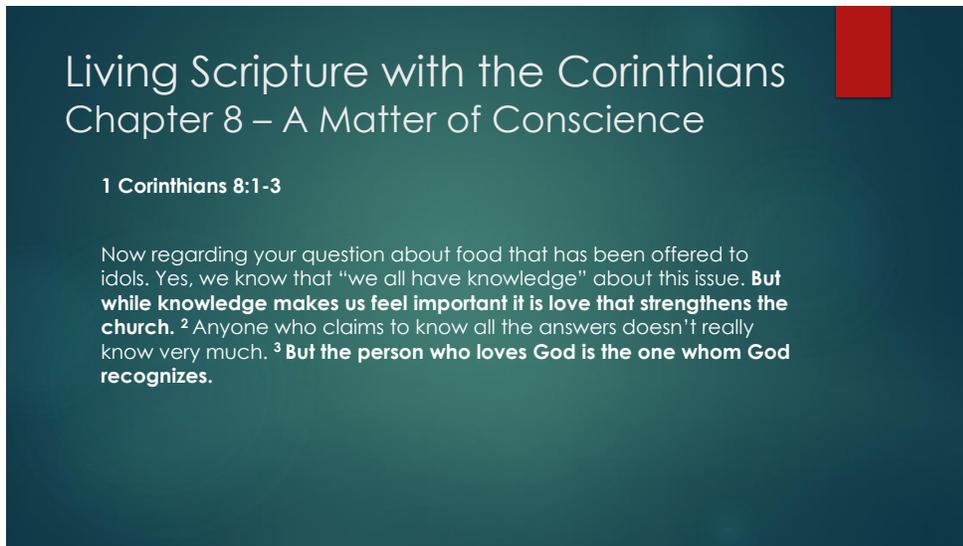
**Cruelty = Hebrew to cover one's garment with violence.** If divorce is banned as a safeguard against violence our human natures have not been designed to bear, WHERE DOES ABUSE & ADDICTION FALL?



**Begins to answer the letter that was written to him (Chloe):**

**Food Sacrificed to Idols**

**8** Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that “we all have knowledge” about this issue. **But while knowledge makes us feel important**[PUFFS US UP], **it is love** [GROWS US UP]**that strengthens the church.** <sup>2</sup> Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much. <sup>3</sup> **But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes**[SO WHAT DOES THIS LOVE MOTIVATE US TO CHANGE? TO DO? TO NOT DO?]



<sup>4</sup>So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. <sup>5</sup>There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. <sup>6</sup>But for us,



There is one God, the Father,  
by whom all things were created,  
and for whom we live.  
And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
through whom all things were created,  
and through whom we live.

## Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – A Matter of Conscience

- ▶ <sup>4</sup> So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. <sup>5</sup> There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. <sup>6</sup> But for us,
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and through whom we live.

<sup>7</sup> However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated <sup>8</sup> It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't lose anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do.

### Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – A Matter of Conscience

<sup>7</sup> However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated.

<sup>8</sup> It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't lose anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do.

<sup>9</sup> But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble. <sup>10</sup> For if others see you—with your “superior knowledge”—eating in the temple of an idol, won't they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol? <sup>11</sup> So because of your superior knowledge, a weak believer<sup>[b]</sup> for whom Christ died will be destroyed. <sup>12</sup> And when you sin against other believers<sup>[c]</sup> by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ. <sup>13</sup> ~~So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble.~~



## Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – A Matter of Conscience

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<sup>10</sup> For if others see you—with your “superior knowledge”—eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol?

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**WHAT IS TODAY’S EQUIVILANT OF EATING FOODS OFFERED TO IDOLS?**

**S/G [WHAT IS TODAY’S EQUIVILANT OF EATING FOODS OFFERED TO IDOLS?]**

What is Paul talking about? Who cares about idol offerings? Are we not responsible for our own actions? Is Paul saying we can blame other’s for their influence to make us ‘sin’ or just compromise?

Matter’s of Conscience: Romans **14:1–23**

## Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – A Matter of Conscience

**WHAT IS TODAY’S EQUIVILANT  
OF EATING FOODS OFFERED TO IDOLS?**

**It has to affect others.**

**It has to contain some controversy.**

**Something you can do that others see.**

**Must affect the conscience. (See Romans 14)**

**CONSCIENCE** A capacity or faculty of moral intuition, consciousness, or reflection. A person’s internal awareness or sense of abiding by or transgressing moral standards. An internal witness to moral obligation based on intuition or self-assessment.

Living Scripture with the Corinthians  
Chapter 8 – 10: A Matter of Conscience

Now, what do we do?



## Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – 10: A Matter of Conscience

*8:13 So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble.*

*9:19 Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.*

*10:23-24 You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is beneficial. <sup>24</sup>Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.*

## Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – 10: A Matter of Conscience

*<sup>9:20</sup>When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. <sup>21</sup>When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.*

*<sup>22</sup>When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. <sup>23</sup>I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.*

*<sup>24</sup>Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! <sup>25</sup>All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. <sup>26</sup>So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. <sup>27</sup>I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*



## Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – 10: A Matter of Conscience

- ▶ *I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ (under the law).*
- ▶ *With the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ (apart from the law).*  
*But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.*
- ▶ *With those who are weak, I share their weakness.*
- ▶ *I try to find common ground with everyone.*
- ▶ *I run with purpose.*
- ▶ *I discipline my body.*

**Complete: I WILL GIVE UP MY RIGHT TO.....**

### CLOSING SLIDE:

## Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 8 – 10: A Matter of Conscience

*We know what real love is  
because Jesus gave up his life for us.  
So we also ought to give up  
our lives for our brothers and sisters*

**1 John 3:16**

**8:13** *So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble.*

**9:19** *Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.*

**10:23** *You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is beneficial. <sup>24</sup> Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.*

**Complete: I WILL GIVE UP MY RIGHT TO.....**

### Paul Gives Up His Rights

<sup>9</sup> Am I not as free as anyone else? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it because of my work that you belong to the Lord?<sup>2</sup> Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle.

<sup>3</sup> This is my answer to those who question my authority.<sup>4</sup> Don't we have the right to live in your homes and share your meals? <sup>5</sup> Don't we have the right to bring a believing wife<sup>6</sup> with us as the other apostles and the Lord's brothers do, and as Peter<sup>7</sup> does? <sup>8</sup> Or is it only Barnabas and I who have to work to support ourselves?

<sup>9</sup> What soldier has to pay his own expenses? What farmer plants a vineyard and doesn't have the right to eat some of its fruit? What shepherd cares for a flock of sheep and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk? <sup>10</sup> Am I expressing merely a human opinion, or does the law say the same thing? <sup>11</sup> For the law of Moses says, "You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain."<sup>12</sup> Was God thinking only about oxen when he said this? <sup>13</sup> Wasn't he actually speaking to us? Yes, it was written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest.

<sup>14</sup> Since we have planted spiritual seed among you, aren't we entitled to a harvest of physical food and drink? <sup>15</sup> If you support others who preach to you, shouldn't we have an even greater right to be supported? But we have never used this right. We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ.

<sup>16</sup> Don't you realize that those who work in the temple get their meals from the offerings brought to the temple? And those who serve at the altar get a share of the sacrificial offerings. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it. <sup>18</sup> Yet I have never used any of these rights. And I am not writing this to suggest that I want to start now. In fact, I would rather die than lose my right to boast about preaching without charge. <sup>19</sup> Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!

<sup>20</sup> If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment. But I have no choice, for God has given me this sacred trust. <sup>21</sup> What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News.

**<sup>19</sup> Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ.**

**[GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF BEING A SLAVE TO ALL PEOPLE.]**



<sup>20</sup> When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. <sup>21</sup> When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law,<sup>[e]</sup> I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

<sup>22</sup> When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. <sup>23</sup> I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

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## 1 Corinthians 9

### Lessons from Israel's Idolatry

<sup>10</sup> I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. <sup>2</sup> In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. <sup>3</sup> All of them ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup> These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, <sup>7</sup> or worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, "The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>8</sup> And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.

<sup>9</sup> Nor should we put Christ<sup>[c]</sup> to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites. <sup>10</sup> And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death. <sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.

### ADDRESS WHERE?

<sup>12</sup> **If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. <sup>13</sup> The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.**

<sup>14</sup> So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. <sup>15</sup> You are reasonable people. Decide for yourselves if what I am saying is true. <sup>16</sup> When we bless the cup at the Lord's Table, aren't we sharing in the blood of Christ? And when we break the bread, aren't we sharing in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf of bread, showing that we are one body. <sup>18</sup> Think about the people of Israel. Weren't they united by eating the sacrifices at the altar?

<sup>19</sup> What am I trying to say? Am I saying that food offered to idols has some significance, or that idols are real gods? <sup>20</sup> No, not at all. I am saying that these sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God. And I don't want you to participate with demons. <sup>21</sup> You cannot drink from the cup of the Lord and from the cup of demons, too. You cannot eat at the Lord's Table and at the table of demons, too. <sup>22</sup> What? Do we dare to rouse the Lord's jealousy? Do you think we are stronger than he is?

<sup>23</sup> **You say, "I am allowed to do anything"<sup>[d]</sup>—but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is beneficial. <sup>24</sup> Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.**

<sup>25</sup> So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience. <sup>26</sup> For "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."<sup>[e]</sup>

<sup>27</sup> If someone who isn't a believer asks you home for dinner, accept the invitation if you want to. Eat whatever is offered to you without raising questions of conscience. <sup>28</sup> (But suppose someone tells you, "This meat was offered to an idol." Don't eat it, out of consideration for the conscience of the one who told you. <sup>29</sup> It might not be a matter of conscience for you, but it is for the other person.) For why should my freedom be limited by what someone else thinks? <sup>30</sup> If I can thank God for the food and enjoy it, why should I be condemned for eating it?

<sup>31</sup> **So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.<sup>32</sup> Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. <sup>33</sup> I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.**

## 1 Corinthians 10



## NOTES:

**1 CORINTHIANS 8**

**CONSCIENCE** A capacity or faculty of moral intuition, consciousness, or reflection. A person's internal awareness or sense of abiding by or transgressing moral standards. An internal witness to moral obligation based on intuition or self-assessment.

**Overview**

The conscience functions as a personal sense of one's conduct, character, or intentions. It can hold the role of a moral monitor, witness, judge, and guide. In the biblical materials, the conscience may also have a more generic sense of "consciousness" or private knowledge, or a reflexive "self-consciousness" (including a self-consciousness of negative moral feelings or guilt).

**Old Testament Concepts**

The feelings of regret, remorse, and self-condemnation seem to be a universal part of the human existence. For example, ancient Egyptians were counseled not to violate the directives of their own hearts (Atallah, "Objective Witness"). Social historians have investigated the pre-Israelite equivalents of the concept of moral conscience, including the sense of religious conscience or guilt (Assmann, *Transformations of the Inner Self*; Graham and May, *Culture and Conscience*). While cultural anthropologists emphasize culture's role in developing an individual's sense of conscience, Scripture portrays God as playing a vital role in this development. Rather than focusing on individualized moral introspection, the Old Testament highlights the external moral standard of the Law (Torah) and the communal covenant with God.

*The Heart*

Although the concept of "conscience" is not explicitly present in the Old Testament, the general concept of moral self-reflection does appear (Wyschogrod, "Judaism and Conscience," 75–81). For example, various psalms express a troubled moral consciousness and the relief of divine forgiveness (Pss 32; 51). Similarly, the prophetic writings can function as a form of social conscience (Vawter, "Conscience of Israel"; Holmgren, "Priests and Prophets," 50–52). In the absence of a specific word for "conscience," the word "heart" (לֵב, *lev*) is used to connote self-awareness, including moral emotions and judgments. The heart is viewed as the core of the person and functions as the seat of feelings such as remorse or obligation. It is also depicted as the location of reflection or inner judgment (compare 1 Sam 24:5; 25:31; 2 Sam 24:10). For example, 2 Samuel 24:10 states, "The heart of David struck him after he had counted the people, and David said to Yahweh, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. So then, O Yahweh, please forgive the guilt of your servant because I have acted very foolishly.'" Here David expresses the notion of a guilty or troubled conscience. Job implies the concept of a clear conscience when he declares, "I hold fast to my righteousness, and I will not let it go; my heart will not blame any of my days" (Job 27:6).

*Greek and Latin Translations*

The Greek word for "conscience" (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) appears several times in the Septuagint:

- It is used in the Greek translation of Eccl 10:20 to refer to one's hidden, internal thoughts.
- Verbal variations appear in the Septuagint of Job 27:6 and Lev 5:1.
- Wisdom 17:11 uses the term in discussing an internal admission of wickedness: "Wickedness is cowardly in itself and stands self-condemned. Someone with a guilty conscience (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) will always imagine things to be worse than they really are" (GNT).
- A variant of the term appears in Sirach 42:18.

The Vulgate uses the Latin term *conscientia* in Gen 43:22 and Eccl 7:23.

**Intertestamental Period**

Vocabulary related to the idea of "conscience" is absent from rabbinic writings and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet notions of a "bad" conscience and a "good" conscience appear in Graeco-Roman writings prior to the New Testament. Several schools of philosophy used the term "conscience" (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*), including Stoicism (compare Epictetus, *Discourses*



3.22.94). Additionally, Cicero and Seneca spoke of a “good” conscience (*conscientia*). Although the New Testament usage of “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) does not seem to borrow directly from any particular school of philosophy, the popular use of the term may have informed Paul’s writings regarding the topic—particularly 1 Cor 8–10 (Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament*).

### New Testament Development

The New Testament reveals a growing notion of the conscience as a witness, confirmation, and guide. The Greek word “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) appears 30 times in the New Testament. Twenty of those occurrences are in Paul’s writings—eleven of which are in 1 Corinthians. Verbal forms of the term occur only four times.

In the New Testament, the term “conscience” could refer to:

- a basic notion of self-understanding or self-awareness
- a bad feeling
- a moral sense of right and wrong that assesses one’s specific actions

### The Gospels

Neither the Synoptic Gospels nor John’s writings (including his letters) use the term “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*; with the exception of variants of the *pericope adulterae* in John 8:9). However, the concept of a conscience may be present in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the son “came to himself” (Luke 15:17–18), and in the description of the enlightened “eye” in Luke 11:33–36 (Zodhiates, *Conscience*). Similarly, John 16:8–11 speaks of the world being convicted because of its sin, and 1 John 3:19–22 speaks of the human heart condemning the individual.

### Acts

The term “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) appears twice in the book of Acts. Both occurrences are in speeches by the Apostle Paul:

1. In Acts 23:1 Paul claims, “Men and brothers, I have lived my life in all good conscience before God to this day.”
2. In Acts 24:16, after mentioning the hope of future resurrection, Paul speaks of a blameless conscience: “For this reason also I myself always do my best to have a clear conscience toward God and people.”

### Paul’s Writings

Two-thirds of the New Testament instances of the term “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) are in Paul’s writings. The most sustained discussion of the conscience within Paul’s writings and the New Testament as a whole is Paul’s assessment of eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8–10; Gooch, “‘Conscience’”). Stepien notes that the conscience is a key facet of Paul’s anthropology (Stepien, “*Syneidēsis*”). Paul calls believers to maintain a pure conscience. According to Paul, people’s behavior should not be contrary to their convictions—they should neither act against their own consciences nor encourage others to act against theirs (1 Cor 8:7–13). He further argues that actions that violate conscience do not arise out of faith (1 Cor 8:7–13; 10:23–30; Rom 14:23). The willful violation of conscience disregards one’s personal wholeness and integrity (compare Rom 14:23; Cranfield, “Some Observations”; Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*).

The term “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) has a broad range of meaning in Paul’s writings. Scholars such as Pierce interpret “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) as a self-awareness parallel to a confidant from whom nothing can be concealed (Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament*). Others, like Horsley, view “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) as parallel to “consciousness,” with a focus on intention (Horsley, “Consciousness and Freedom”). Ultimately, the idea of “conscience” seems to envelop both dimensions: It can be translated as moral “self-awareness” or moral “consciousness” in 1 Cor 8:7–13, and it may carry a sense of guilt or remorse in 1 Cor 10:25–30. The conscience may be either “emboldened” (1 Cor 8:10) or “wounded” (1 Cor 8:12), and it may be “weak” or “defiled” (1 Cor 8:7, 10, 12). Paul did not wish for the “weak” to stumble and be destroyed (1 Cor 8:11–13).

**Conscience as a Moral Compass.** In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul depicts the conscience as an internal moral compass (Gooch, “‘Conscience’”). In the context of a community, this leads to respect for different understandings of the demands of the Christian life (Reinhard, “Conscience”). Personal conscience is integrated with a notion of personal liberty guided by charity (1 Cor 10:31–33) and is formed by maturity (compare 1 Cor 8:7–13; Heb 5:12–14). In the specific case of food sacrificed to idols, Paul advised his readers not to ask questions concerning food purchased in the meat market “for the sake of conscience” (1 Cor 10:25). Similarly, when invited to eat at an unbeliever’s house, Paul recommended that no questions be asked “for the sake of conscience” (1 Cor 10:27). He adds, “But if someone says to you, ‘This is offered to



idols, do not eat it, for the sake of that one who informed you and the conscience. Now I am not speaking about your own conscience, but the conscience of the other person. For why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?" (1 Cor 10:28–29).

**Conscience as a Witness.** Paul further portrays the conscience as a “witness” to something (Rom 2:15; 9:1; 2 Cor 1:12; 4:2; 5:11; Reicke, “*Syneidēsis*”), as in Rom 2:14–15: “For whenever the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things of the law, these, although they do not have the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written on their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts one after another accusing or even defending them” (Atallah, “Objective Witness”). In this case, Paul portrays the conscience as a God-given alarm system regarding poor behavior. The conscience can also urge someone to act in a positive manner. For example, in the context of obedience to government, Paul states, “Therefore *it is* necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience” (Rom 13:5; Stringfellow, *Conscience & Obedience*).

**Conscience as a Moral Standard.** Paul seems to propose that the “conscience” performed a similar function to the Law (Thrall, “Pauline Use,” 124; Good, “Conscience,” 251–52). Nevertheless, the conscience is not the ultimate standard of moral goodness. Having a clear conscience (e.g., 2 Cor 1:12) does not necessarily mean that a person is without fault. Likewise, the conscience does not function as an infallible or supreme standard, as the Lord is the ultimate judge (1 Cor 4:4; compare Acts 5:2). Nevertheless, use of one's conscience clearly shapes one's character (Packer, “Conscience, Choice and Character”).

Modern research demonstrates that consciences are shaped by parents, teachers, and mentors, and can be informed by acculturation and instruction. Additionally, people can internalize wider social customs as personal expectations. Thus, the conscience is neither the direct voice of God nor an infallible guide. Yet a properly sensitized conscience can function as a moral “alarm system.” Therefore, the conscience should be guarded and respected. Paul speaks of the conscience in connection with God (2 Cor 1:12; 4:2) and the Holy Spirit (Rom 9:1). He was concerned with helping others maintain a healthy conscience (2 Cor 4:2; 5:11). For Paul, a “weak” conscience is based on a wrong value system or inadequate knowledge; those with “weak” consciences must be instructed (1 Cor 8:7) and their minds renewed (compare Rom 12:1–2). In this view, because the conscience can be cultivated and calibrated, it must be educated, informed, and tended.

#### *Pastoral Letters*

“Conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) appears six times in the Pastoral Letters, always combined with an attributive adjective (1 Tim 1:5, 19; 3:9; 4:2; 2 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:15). Overall, the Pastoral Letters emphasize the importance of “having faith and a good conscience” (1 Tim 1:19). First Timothy 1:5 states that “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a faith without hypocrisy.” The Pastorals also speak of a “defiled” conscience (Titus 1:15) and of a “seared” conscience (1 Tim 4:2), thus indicating that individuals do not always feel guilty when they commit moral error. Believers are encouraged to hold “the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9). Using the same adjective “clean” or “pure” (καθαρός, *katharos*), Paul declared, “I am thankful to God, whom I have served with a clear conscience as my ancestors did” (2 Tim 1:3).

#### *Hebrews*

While Paul frequently uses “conscience” in discussions of human relationships, the book of Hebrews focuses on one's conscience before God (Selby, “Meaning and Function”). Hebrews speaks of the new covenant ministry of the law written on the hearts of believers (Heb 8:10; 10:16). According to Hebrews 10:2, under the old covenant the sacrifice of animals could not cleanse the conscience, resulting in a continued awareness of sinfulness. The tabernacle “was a symbol for the present time, in which both the gifts and sacrifices which were offered were not able to perfect the worshiper with respect to the conscience” (Heb 9:9).

The author of Hebrews argues that the believer's conscience has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ so that it no longer accuses and condemns (Heb 9:14; 10:22). Hebrews speaks of both a cleansed conscience (Heb 9:14) and a “good conscience” (Heb 13:18), exhorting believers, “let us approach with a true heart in the full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). The author refers to the “conscience” in the closing of the letter: “Pray for us, for we are convinced that we have a good conscience, *and* want to conduct ourselves commendably in every way” (Heb 13:18).

#### *1 and 2 Peter*



First and Second Peter use “conscience” in context of how Christians, as “aliens and strangers,” are to conduct themselves in the midst of opposition:

- First Peter 2:19 speaks of those who suffer unjustly because of “conscience toward God” or “consciousness of God.”
- First Peter 3:16 affirms, “having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.”
- First Peter 3:21 describes baptism as “the answer of a good conscience toward God” or “an appeal to God for a good conscience” (Colwell, “Baptism, Conscience”).

### Early Church

In the first century AD, Philo reflects a theology of the conscience as a normative sense shaped by the law (Bosman, *Conscience in Philo and Paul*). The Greek word “conscience” (συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*) appears in the following writings from the early church:

- the *Didache* 4.14
- Ignatius’ Epistle to the Trallians 7.2
- Polycarp’s Epistle to the Philipppians 5.3
- the *Letter of Barnabas* 19.12
- the Shepherd of Hermas (Mandate 1.4)
- 2 Clement 16.4
- 1 Clement 1.7; 2.4; 34.7; 41.1; 45.7

### History of Interpretation

Largely grounded on the discussion of conscience in 1 Cor 8–10, the Reformers expounded theologies of personal conscience regarding “doubtful matters” (*adiaphora*). Throughout history, interpreters have reflected on the notion of the freedom of conscience, along with the related concepts of religious liberty and toleration. While grounded in a New Testament theology of conscience (especially Paul’s discussions of personal conscience), the topic has developed in various ways through interreligious dialogue and legal application. By reflecting on a theology of personal conscience, early modern theologians elaborated on rich notions of “individual soul liberty” and “individual soul competence,” especially in early Baptist traditions. Some recent scholars have tried to integrate the biblical materials with psychological studies (Rozell, “Implications”) and pastoral counseling (Borchert, “Romans”).

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**8:1–11:1 Food Offered to Idols.** Because pagan temples offered parts of animals in sacrifice to the gods, they also often functioned as butcher shops and banqueting halls. Sometimes meals for trade guilds, clubs, and private dinner parties were held in a temple dining room. Often meat from a temple was sold to the public in the marketplace. This section of 1 Corinthians gives clear guidance about the use of such food. Paul first urges the Corinthians not to eat in pagan temples (8:10) because it might lead to the destruction of a weaker brother or sister (ch. 8). He then offers himself as an example of giving up something one is convinced is a right for the spiritual edification of others (ch. 9). He urges the Corinthians not to eat in pagan temples because doing so is idolatry (10:1–22). Finally, he says that eating meat purchased in the marketplace (which may have come from a pagan temple) is not wrong unless it hinders the advancement of the gospel (10:23–11:1).

**8:1 food offered to idols.** In Greek, this phrase is one word (*eidōlothytos*, lit., “something offered to an idol”). Paul is talking about food, however, because he uses the word for “food” (Gk. *brōsis*) in v. 4. Since only part of an animal was used in sacrifices to pagan gods, much of the animal could still be eaten. Paul speaks later in this chapter of eating such food in a banqueting hall attached to a temple and therefore in an explicitly religious setting (v. 10). Pre-Pauline evidence of such temple banquets at Corinth is found at the Sanctuary of Asklepios and at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, and such feasting likely continued during Paul’s day. “**all of us possess knowledge.**” Quotation marks have been supplied to indicate that this statement probably originated with the Corinthians and that Paul is responding to it (cf. 1:12; 3:4; 6:12, 13; 7:1; 8:4; 10:23). What the Corinthians “know” is explained in 8:4. **puffs up.** Once again, Corinthian arrogance is seen as a problem (see also 3:21; 4:6, 8, 18–19).

**8:3 known by God.** God knows those who belong to him (13:12; John 10:14; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19), and there is a close bond between belonging to God and sharing love for God and neighbor (1 John 3:16; 4:20).

**8:4–6** Paul agrees with what the Corinthians **know**, that idols do not represent real “**gods**” and “**lords.**” There is only **one God**, and since he is the creator of the animals that pagan priests offer to nonexistent gods, no problem should be attached to the consumption of the meat itself (see also 10:19–20, 25–26). Paul will later distinguish between eating at a temple dinner (which, as a religious event, is idolatry) and eating meat bought in the marketplace. So far in this passage he is concerned only with the food itself, not the setting in which it is eaten.

**8:7** The pagans of Paul’s day feared what the gods might do to those who neglected to worship them. Some of the Christians in Corinth probably found it a constant struggle to place their trust solely in Christ instead of trying to placate the gods they used to worship.

**8:8** Those who had the supposedly superior “knowledge” (vv. 1, 4) that permitted them to participate in dinners held at pagan temples may have thought that this knowledge gave them special standing with God.

**8:9 this right of yours.** Paul is speaking from the Corinthians’ perspective. He will later deny that anyone in the Corinthian church has the right to eat meals in pagan temples. To do this is to practice idolatry and so to open oneself to the influence of demons (10:7, 14, 20–22). Even if they had the right to eat in temples they should refrain from using this right out of concern for the spiritual well-being of the person whose conscience is weak (8:7). **stumbling block.** See Rom. 14:13, 20.

**8:10–11 eating in an idol’s temple.** See notes on 8:1–11:1; 8:1. Paul elsewhere uses **destroyed** (Gk. *apollymi*) to mean eternal destruction (Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10), and some interpreters take Paul’s use of the term here in the same sense. Others see this as a reference to the moral harm done to the weaker brother (his conscience “is defiled,” 1 Cor. 8:7).

**9:1 Am I not free?** Paul offers his own willingness to give up his rights for the spiritual benefit of the Corinthians as an example that those with superior “knowledge” (8:1–2) should follow (see 10:23–11:1).

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<sup>1</sup> Hartog, P. A. (2016). [Conscience](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



**9:2 seal.** Seals in the ancient Near East were used to guarantee the quality and authenticity of a document (such as a letter) or product (such as wine); see note on John 6:27. The change that Paul's preaching of the gospel effected in the hearts of the Corinthians shows that his apostleship is genuine. See also 2 Cor. 1:21–22; 3:3.

**9:4–5 right.** Paul used the same word (Gk. *exousia*) in 8:8 for the supposed "right" of Corinthians with superior "knowledge" to eat meals in pagan temples. As an apostle whose primary vocation was proclaiming the gospel and establishing churches, Paul had the right to receive material support from those churches (see Matt. 10:9–10; Luke 10:7; 1 Thess. 2:6–7; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 5:17–18) and to travel with a wife (if he were married). **to take along a believing wife.** Paul was not married but he had a high regard for marriage among ministers of the gospel (see 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:3; Titus 1:6). None of **the brothers of the Lord** followed him prior to his resurrection (John 7:5). The risen Lord appeared, however, to his brother James (1 Cor. 15:7; cf. Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal. 1:19), who later became the leading figure in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9, 12). Jesus also had a brother named "Judas" (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), and this is probably the same person who authored the Letter of Jude (or Judas) and calls himself "the brother of James" (Jude 1).

**9:6 Barnabas** was a Jewish Christian from the priestly tribe of Levi, a native of the island of Cyprus, and an early member of the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:36). He and Paul joined forces on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–14:28).

**9:7** With three examples from everyday life, Paul observes the commonsense principle that those who work hard should benefit from their labor.

**9:8–9** The gospel has brought important changes in the application of the Mosaic **Law** to the lives of God's people (7:19; see also the articles on Biblical Ethics), but it remains God's Word and therefore continues to instruct Christians about God's character and scale of values.

**9:12a others.** Probably a reference to those listed in v. 5 who had traveled through Corinth and received material support from the Corinthians while ministering there.

**9:15 I have made no use.** Paul occasionally did receive material support from churches for his proclamation of the gospel (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 2:25; 4:14–18), but he appears never to have received such support from the Christians in the immediate geographical location in which he was working at any given time (2 Cor. 11:7–8). **boasting.** Paul uses this word not in its usual sense of pride that steals glory from God (see 1 Cor. 1:29) but rather as expressing a rightful sense of joy and fulfillment in what God has done through him (e.g., see Acts 14:27; Rom. 15:17–19; 2 Cor. 1:14; 10:7–8; Gal. 6:4; Phil. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:7–8).

**9:17 stewardship.** This term (Gk. *oikonomia*) refers to the responsibility of managing a household. Paul uses it metaphorically to say that God has entrusted him with a responsibility to which he must be faithful, whether he benefits from it materially or not. That responsibility is to proclaim the gospel and share its blessings (v. 23). (See also Eph. 3:2, 9.)

**9:18 free of charge.** Paul preached the gospel in urban centers where itinerant orators were a common sight. Some of them openly used their rhetorical skills to seek fame and fortune. Other more philosophically inclined teachers proclaimed self-discipline and verbally despised the world but sometimes actually pocketed large sums from their followers as they moved from town to town. Paul seeks to distinguish himself from such preachers (cf. 1 Thess. 2:3–5, 9–10). It is recorded elsewhere that Paul used his manual labor to set an example of hard work for new Christians, some of whom had a tendency to take advantage of the charitable impulses of the larger group (1 Thess. 4:11; 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6–9).

**9:20 I became as a Jew.** Paul was a Jew (2 Cor. 11:22; Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:5) and valued his Jewish heritage (Rom. 9:3–5), but the Jewish Messiah himself had nullified the distinctively Jewish parts of the Mosaic law (Matt. 15:11; Mark 7:19; Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 2:11–14; 6:2; Eph. 2:14–15). In Christ, God had created a newly defined people where there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:9; Rom. 3:22; 10:12; 1 Cor. 10:32). **became as one under the law.** Paul was willing to adopt the Jewish way of life temporarily to gain a hearing among Jews (Acts 16:3; 21:17–26), but his ethnicity no longer defined his existence (Phil. 3:3).

**9:21 those outside the law.** Outside the Mosaic law, which defined the Jewish way of life. **not ... outside the law of God ... the law of Christ.** Paul seems to distinguish between the Jewish law and something he calls alternately "the commandments of God" (cf. 7:19) and "the law of Christ," which is of continuing validity for Christians, whatever their ethnicity. This second



law appears to include the ethical teaching of Jesus as well as absorbing both the theological structure and many of the moral precepts of the Mosaic law. (See, e.g., Rom. 7:7, 12, 22; 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14; 6:2; Eph. 6:2; see also the articles on Biblical Ethics.) This “law of Christ” today would also include the moral commands of the NT epistles, since in them the apostles interpreted and applied Christ’s life and teachings to the NT churches.

**9:22 To the weak I became weak.** This is the attitude that Paul wants those in Corinth with superior “knowledge” to adopt toward the “weak” in their midst (cf. 8:9–13).

**9:24–27** Paul frequently uses athletic metaphors to describe the rigors and single-minded focus of his apostolic work to pursue the advancement of the gospel (see also Phil. 3:12–14; 2 Tim. 4:7–8). The extended metaphor is particularly apt in a letter to Corinth, which was the location of the biennial Isthmian games, at that time second in fame only to the Olympic games. Paul’s stay in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18) may have overlapped with the games in either A.D. 49 or 51. The **perishable wreath** was a crown (Gk. *stephanos*) of foliage (and therefore quick to wither) which was given to the victor in a public athletic contest. Paul thinks of his congregations as the victor’s crown that he will wear on the final day (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19).

**9:26** Like an athlete, Paul has a single-minded goal: to bring as many people as possible, from whatever station in life, to faith in the gospel (vv. 19–23).

**9:27** This verse has a long history of misinterpretation in terms of punishing one’s own body as a means of spiritual discipline. Paul’s language, however, is governed both by the athletic metaphor of the previous two verses and by the physical demands of his apostolic work (4:9, 11–13; 2 Cor. 4:8–12; 6:3–10; 11:23–12:10; 1 Thess. 2:1–2, 9; 3:7–8). Just as an athlete goes through physical training that is sometimes uncomfortable in order to attain the goal of victory, so Paul endures physical and emotional hardship, and gives up his right to material support, for the gospel’s advancement. (See 1 Cor. 9:12 and 2 Cor. 6:1–10.) **Disqualified** (Gk. *adokimos*, “not approved, not standing the test”) in this context means “disqualified from receiving rewards” (see 1 Cor. 9:24–26).

**10:1 For** connects vv. 1–22 to what Paul has been saying about giving up personal rights for the sake of the gospel (chs. 8–9). The example of Israel’s experience in the wilderness should warn the Corinthians of what can happen to people who hear God’s words and see his works but do not come to true faith. **our fathers.** Most of the Corinthians were Gentiles, but Paul assumes continuity between them and OT Israel. **The cloud ... the sea** refers to the generation of Israelites that God delivered from slavery in Egypt and led through the wilderness (Ex. 13:17–14:31).

**10:2 baptized into Moses.** God provided a cloud to lead Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 13:17–22). He also used Moses to part the Red Sea and enable Israel to escape the pursuing Egyptians, who then drowned in the water when God (through Moses) closed it over them (Ex. 14:1–31). Paul interprets these events as analogous to being “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).

**10:3–4 spiritual food ... drink.** Paul is referring to God providing Israel with bread from heaven (“manna,” Exodus 16) and water from a rock. This rock appears both at the beginning of their wanderings in the desert (Ex. 17:1–7) and near the end (Num. 20:2–13). Rabbinic exegesis from after Paul’s time surmised that the rock followed the Israelites throughout their wanderings. This understanding of the rock may have been current in Paul’s time. If so, Paul’s claim that the **Rock** following them was both **spiritual** and **Christ** shows that he did not believe that a physical rock traveled with the Israelites, but that Christ (in spiritual form) was ever-present with them: he was there to supply their need for water, and there to judge those who tested him (1 Cor. 10:9). “Rock” is a common OT name for God (e.g., Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30–31), and this probably facilitated Paul’s identification of the rock with Christ.

**10:5 overthrown.** Because of their disobedience and grumbling against God, the Israelite generation that experienced God’s miraculous deliverance from Egypt and his provision of bread and water did not see the Promised Land. (See Num. 14:22–23, 29, 37; 26:64–65.) Though they had seen many of God’s miracles, only a few had genuine faith (see Heb. 3:16–19; 4:2).

**10:6 as examples for us.** See v. 11; 9:10; Rom. 15:4.

**10:7 idolaters.** Paul begins to make the case that eating in the temple of a pagan god is not actually the “right” that the Corinthians imagined (8:9–10) but is participation in “the table of demons” (10:21) and idolatry. For a Christian to eat meals



in such temples is to follow the unhappy example of the Israelites. They benefited from God's redemptive work but still fell into worship of the local gods (Ex. 32:1–6).

**10:8 sexual immorality.** Glancing back to his discussion of sexual immorality in 5:1–13 and 6:12–20, Paul reminds the Corinthians that God punished the wilderness generation of Israelites for the same sin. See Num. 25:1–9. **twenty-three thousand.** Numbers 25:9 says “twenty-four thousand.” Both are fair approximations, rather than an exact number, of the people who died, which probably was all that either writer intended.

**10:9 Christ.** Paul sees Christ as spiritually present with God's people in OT times (see note on vv. 3–4; cf. Jude 5). The Israelites tested Christ (“God” in Num. 21:5) by becoming “impatient” with his provision of water and food.

**10:10 grumble.** See the grumbling and divine judgment in Num. 11:1; 14:1–38; 16:11–35. **The Destroyer** is not mentioned in Numbers, although Paul apparently views the angel who executed God's judgment during the exodus as the destroying agent in these instances also (Ex. 12:23; Heb. 11:28).

**10:11** See v. 6; 9:10; Rom. 15:4. In saying that **these things happened**, Paul affirms even minor details of the OT, thus indicating his complete confidence in the truthfulness of every detail of the OT Scriptures. Paul's confidence thus supports the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. The OT Scriptures point toward **the end of the ages**, the age in which the Corinthian Christians are living. Cf. Heb. 11:39–40; 1 Pet. 1:10–12. **example.** On the examples (“types”) in the OT, see Overview of the Bible.

**10:12 thinks that he stands.** Perhaps a reference to the Corinthians' mistaken “knowledge” that they have the right to eat in an idol's temple (8:9–10).

**10:13 will not let you be tempted beyond your ability ... will also provide the way of escape.** Even when Christians face morally confusing situations, they should never think that they have no options other than sinful ones. There will always be a morally right solution that does not require disobedience to any of God's moral laws.

**10:14 Therefore, ... flee from idolatry.** This is the point toward which Paul has been moving throughout ch. 10. The Corinthians cannot participate in idolatry and then think that they will receive eternal life on the last day (see notes on 6:16–18; 10:7; 10:8).

**10:16 cup of blessing ... we bless.** (See 11:23–26 and notes.) Paul refers to the cup in the Lord's Supper. Jesus gave thanks for the cup (Matt. 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17); the earliest Christian observance of the Lord's Supper imitated this custom. **Participation** (Gk. *koinōnia*) sometimes refers to fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9) or the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1); sometimes it means aligning oneself with someone else's plight or cause (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Gal. 2:9; Phil. 1:5; 3:10). Since this context emphasizes the incompatibility of participating in meals in pagan temples and participating in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:21), Paul probably means that those who eat the Lord's Supper align themselves with Jesus, share his sufferings (see Phil. 3:10), and benefit from his death. (See also note on 1 Cor. 10:18.)

**10:17 one bread ... one body.** After Jesus gave thanks for and broke the bread, he said, “This is my body which is for you” (11:24). The church is also Christ's body (see also 12:12, 27; Eph. 1:22–23; 4:15–16; 5:23, 29–30). The Lord's Supper, therefore, is an occasion when members of the church declare their unity with each other because of their common unity with Christ.

**10:18 participants.** Greek *koinōnoi*, a term closely related to *koinōnia* (see note on v. 16). The altar in the OT was a table on which food was sacrificed to God, and the priests ate from the offerings (see, e.g., Lev. 6:17–18; 7:32–35). The altar, therefore, provided an apt analogy to “the table of the Lord” (1 Cor. 10:21) since in both instances the benefits of the table belonged to the priests, inasmuch as believers in Christ are priests to God (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6).

**10:19–20** Paul knows that **demons** delight in the worship of any “god” but the one true God and therefore take a special interest in idolatry. In Deut. 32:17–18 sacrifice to false gods, called “demons” there, is contrasted with worship of God, who is called “the Rock” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:4). False religions are not merely the result of human imagination and human energy but generally have demonic power behind them. Not everything that seems “supernatural” is from God.



**10:22** God's **jealousy** is not the sinful emotion of envy that characterizes human jealousy. It is God's righteous concern to protect the truth that he is the Creator of the universe and that he alone, not "gods" of human invention, deserves human praise. Those who worship idols provoke God's jealousy and receive his wrath, as Israel had experienced in the wilderness. (See Ex. 20:4–5; Deut. 4:23–24; 5:8–9; 6:14–15; 29:18–20; 32:16, 21.)

**10:23–11:1** Paul now begins to address a different issue entirely from the problem that has consumed his attention in ch. 8 and 10:1–22. Those sections dealt with eating meals in pagan temples, but this section deals with meat previously sacrificed to idols being eaten in private homes, especially the home of an unbeliever (10:27–30). The principles Paul has developed in ch. 9, however, still apply. Paul wants the Corinthians to act toward others in a way that will not inhibit the advance of the gospel.

**10:23** "All things are lawful." See note on 6:12–13. **build up.** See note on 8:10–11.

**10:27 without raising any question.** The Christian is not to question the host about whether the food being served had ever been involved in pagan rituals. Such questions are theologically unnecessary (vv. 25–26), and because they could be perceived as rude, they violate the principle of vv. 23–24 and 9:19–23.

**10:28 someone says.** This person may be: (1) an unbeliever who erroneously thinks that Christians must abstain from such food and is confronting a believer with a test of faith; (2) an unbeliever who thinks Christians abstain from such food and, in good faith, wants the Christian to know where it came from; or (3) a "weak" believer whose conscience erroneously dictates that Christians should avoid such food (8:10; see also Rom. 14:14, 20–21). Since the person's **conscience** motivated the comment, and the weak believer's conscience was an important concern in 1 Cor. 8:7–13, this last option is most likely.

**10:31 do all to the glory of God.** Every aspect of every Christian's life has the potential to honor God.

**11:1 imitators of me.** See note on 4:16; see also Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:7–9; 2 Tim. 3:10–12.<sup>2</sup>

## MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE

### Romans 14:1

#### 14:1–23 MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE

***One noticeable difference between Christianity and most other religions is that Christians are not bound by ritualistic rules. Paul discusses two examples here in Rom. 14: special days of religious observance (14:5–13) and food (14:2–4, 14–23). However, the principles he sets forth apply to all matters of conscience, the "gray" areas of life for which Scripture prescribes no specific behavior one way or another.***

Special observances and food were apparently trouble spots for the Roman believers. No doubt those from Jewish backgrounds brought their heritage of strict Sabbath-keeping and were shocked to find Gentile believers to whom Sabbath days were inconsequential. Likewise, some from pagan backgrounds may have encouraged the church to form its own counterparts to the festival days they had practiced in their former religions. Either way, the keeping of "holy days" created tension in the church.

So did the issue of eating meat. The pagan religions of the day offered meat as sacrifices to their idols. The meat was then sold to the general public. As it tended to be among the choicest cuts, it made for good eating. But many believers objected to eating such meat, or meat of any kind, lest they give tacit approval to the practice of idolatry. Others, however, saw no problem (v. 2). Again, Christians lined up on both sides of the issue. Predictably, people began to question each other's spirituality and dispute over whose position was "right" (14:1).

Do these situations sound familiar? Perhaps meat sacrificed to idols is not an issue for believers today. But plenty of issues have managed to divide believers today. Does Paul offer any perspective on settling such disputes? Yes:

<sup>2</sup> Crossway Bibles. (2008). [The ESV Study Bible](#) (pp. 2202–2206). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.



**(1) No Christian should judge another regarding disputable things (14:3–4, 13). We may have opinions about what is right and wrong. But Christ is the Judge, for us and for others.**

**(2) Each person needs to come to his or her own convictions regarding matters of conscience (14:5, 22–23). God has given us a mind and the responsibility to think things through and decide what is best for ourselves in cases where the Scriptures are not clear. Unexamined morality is as irresponsible as no morality.**

**(3) We are not totally free to do as we please; we must answer to the Lord for our behavior (14:7–8, 12).**

**(4) We should avoid offending others by flaunting our liberty (14:13). A “stumbling block” is an ancient metaphor for giving offense. It is easy to offend believers whose consciences are immature—that is, who lack the knowledge and confidence of their liberty in Christ (14:2; 1 Cor. 8:9–12). This can happen in two ways: through trampling on their sensibilities by deliberately engaging in practices they find offensive, or through tempting them to engage in something they regard as sin. Even actions that are not inherently sinful can produce sin if they cause others to stumble.**

**(5) We should practice love, pursuing peace in the body and that which builds others up in the faith (Rom. 14:15, 19). Christianity is just as concerned with community and healthy relationships as it is with morality. To be sure, there are matters that are worth fighting for. But where God is either silent or has left room for personal choice, believers need to practice tolerance and consider what is best for all.**

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*Sorting out matters of conscience is closely related to another mental discipline called **theological reflection**. This involves using what we know about God to think about the issues and circumstances of our lives. To learn more about this process and some of the people in the Bible who used it, see “Celebrating God’s Guidance” at Gen. 45:5–8.*

*In a related text, Paul appeals to conscience for settling controversial issues. See “Gray Areas” at 1 Cor. 8:1–13.*

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## 1 Corinthians 8:1

### GRAY AREAS

**8:1–13** In first-century Corinth, meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:1) proved to be an issue on which believers vehemently disagreed. It was a “gray” area of life, a matter for which there seemed to be no clear-cut instruction. **How should Christians settle such disputes?** Through a predetermined set of dos and don’ts? No, Paul offered a different perspective, one that appeals to conscience.

Paul argued that food and drink do not determine our relationship to God (8:8). Meat offered to idols is inconsequential because, ultimately, there is no such thing as an idol (8:4–6). An idol is not God, so the mere fact that a priest blesses meat and offers it to an idol means nothing. From that point of view, Christians should be able to enjoy whatever food they want.

However, questionable practices may affect one’s relationships with fellow believers or unbelievers (8:9). As members of Christ’s family we are obligated not to be a “stumbling block,” but a loving neighbor. Our faith is not merely private, but has a corporate ethic and public responsibility as well.

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<sup>3</sup> [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., Ro 14:1). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



**So we live in a tension: God's grace frees us to choose as we please, but God's love requires us to ask questions of conscience about our choices.** From what we eat, to whom we live and work with, to where we live, to what we do with our money and time—almost everything we do affects our neighbors (8:10–13). So we need to ask, Are we treating them with love?

We need not allow others to manipulate us through legalistic criticism. But we do need discretion as to how our choices affect those around us. It's not enough to follow Christ just in our hearts; we also need to follow Him in our consciences.

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*Several other principles that apply to these issues can be found in "Matters of Conscience" at Rom. 14:1–23.*

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#### Decision Making

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#### Morality

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#### Faith in the Public Arena

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## GENESIS 45:5–8

### CELEBRATING GOD'S GUIDANCE

*Modern-day believers are able to examine the Scriptures to understand a host of everyday concerns—work, ethics, the church, marriage and family, decision making, and many others. But what do we do when we face a situation that the Bible doesn't address directly? How can we understand God's ways?*

Many people in Scripture faced this very question. For example, the characters of Genesis had to interpret life without the benefit of any of the Old Testament. Likewise, the Jews of David's day had only the five books of the Law and a few other portions of Scripture. In the early church, believers had only the Old Testament, except where some of the various narratives and letters that became the New Testament were circulated.

How did these people of faith make sense of their circumstances? Sometimes God spoke directly, but in many cases His purposes were not immediately obvious, but dawned on people only after considerable thought. Today we might call this 20/20 hindsight. But another term would be *theological reflection*, a somewhat fancy phrase with a simple meaning: to look backward from time to time at how God has worked in one's life.

Joseph's remarks upon revealing himself to his brothers (45:5–8) are a good illustration of theological reflection. Joseph had to wrestle with some tough life questions: Why did his life have to be disrupted by his jealous brothers? Why was he wrenched from his family and sent to Egypt? Why did he have to spend several years in prison on a trumped up charge? Why, after all of that, should he suddenly find himself elevated to a position of unparalleled

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<sup>4</sup> [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., 1 Co 8:1). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



power and prominence over one of the world’s great empires? Where was God in all of these experiences? And why had He allowed any of this to happen?

And one other question: Now, as he faced his brothers, why should he show them any mercy? Why should he not avenge himself for the wrongs they had caused him to suffer?

Joseph had no biblical passages to turn to for help with these matters. Nor did he have any wise, godly counselors that we know of. He was on his own to sort it all out. So he took what he knew of God and used it to interpret his experience of people and the world. His conclusion? “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (50:20).

To some that might sound like a pat answer or a simplistic attempt to “make lemons into lemonade.” But it was not. Joseph never denied reality. He knew better than anyone that his enslavement and imprisonment had been brought about by wicked schemes. “You sold me here,” he reminded his brothers (45:5).

But Joseph also had to cope with his sufferings somehow, and he did so by discerning God’s purposes in them: “God sent me before you to preserve life ... to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives” (45:5, 7). In effect, Joseph incorporated his pain into God’s divine plan.

**Examples of Theological Reflection in Scripture**

Again, such after-the-fact recognition of God’s will does not absolve wrongdoers of the sins they have committed, nor does it remove pain from one’s memory. But it does do justice to the events that have occurred and validates one’s life experience. Neither is this a mind game. Since we have only limited understanding and experience of God’s wisdom and glory, theological reflection weaves our human limitations into a broader tapestry.

Theological reflection can be an especially valuable exercise if you live and work where the Bible is not upheld as a moral or theological compass. In that kind of “secular” environment, you need to think carefully and critically about what God may be up to, just as Joseph did in Egypt. In fact, theological reflection was a habit of a number of people in the Bible, as the following table shows:

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**MAKE CHART FOR A H.O.**

**EXAMPLES OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN SCRIPTURE**

<b>Joseph</b> (Gen. 45:5–8; 50:20)	Egypt	God, not his brothers, sold him into slavery; God used it to preserve His people.
<b>Solomon</b> (Eccl. 1:1)	Jerusalem	Apart from God, all of life is “vanity”—emptiness and futility.
<b>Mordecai</b> (Esth. 4:14)	Persia	God enabled Esther to become the queen of Persia in order to spare His people from genocide.

<sup>5</sup> [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., Ge 45:5). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



**Paul** (Philem. 15–16)

Writing to Philemon in  
Colosse

Onesimus the slave ran away in order that God might bring him to salvation and return him to his master as a brother in Christ (see “Perhaps. . .” at Philem. 15–16).<sup>6</sup>

“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this **1 Cor. 1:20** world?”

“But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a **1 Cor. 1:23–24** stumbling block and the to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

“Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, **1 Cor. 3:12** straw.”

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are **1 Cor. 6:12** not helpful.”

“Do you not know that your body is the **1 Cor. 6:19** temple of the Holy Spirit ... and you are not your own?”

“I have become all things to all men, that I **1 Cor. 9:22** might be all means save some.”

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take **1 Cor. 10:12** heed lest he fall.”

“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be **1 Cor. 10:13** tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; **1 Cor. 13:13** but the greatest of these is love.”

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, **1 Cor. 15:55**<sup>7</sup> where is your victory?”

**9:1–23** PAYING VOCATIONAL CHRISTIAN WORKERS

<sup>6</sup> [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

**How much should pastors, missionaries, and others who work in churches and ministries be paid? Or should they be paid at all? Paul's example with the Corinthians offers some insight.**

In Paul's day, philosophers traveled from city to city, teaching publicly for a fee. The more prestigious the teacher, the larger the fee. However, Paul charged the Corinthians nothing when he came and delivered the gospel message. As a result, some were criticizing him, asserting that he must not be an authentic leader of the church if he was rendering his services for free.

In reply, Paul explained himself (1 Cor. 9). First, he insisted that those who labor spiritually should be supported materially by those with whom they work. He pointed to five familiar examples to support his position:

- (1) Roman soldiers drew pay for their service (9:7).
- (2) Vintners enjoyed the fruits of their vineyards (9:7).
- (3) Shepherds received food from their flocks (9:7).
- (4) The Old Testament Law affirmed the right of laborers to receive fair compensation (9:8–10).
- (5) The Law also allowed temple priests and attendants to live off of the sacrifices that the people brought (9:13).

Paul also explained that the Lord Himself allowed those who preach the gospel to make their living from that occupation (9:14). Elsewhere the apostle wrote that church elders who rule well are worthy of "double honor" (1 Tim. 5:17–18). The context shows that Paul had payment in mind. In short, effective vocational Christian workers should be paid fairly for their labor.

Yet Paul refused payment in Corinth. Why? Because He felt that he owed it to God to communicate the gospel for free. When he considered his past and how God had saved him, the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), it was payment enough to be able to tell people about Jesus (1 Cor. 9:18).

Should workers in churches and ministries be paid? This passage insists that they have a right to a fair wage, and Christians today do well to pay attention to Paul's words here in light of the many workers who are leaving the ministry because of inadequate support. On the other hand, Paul's example opens the door to an alternative—the idea of carrying out ministry for free while supporting oneself through other means. That is also a model worth considering in a day when, for a variety of reasons, an increasing number of churches and ministries are strapped for funds. ♦

**RACERS' STARTING BLOCKS****THE GAMES****9:24–27**

Paul's use of running, boxing, and other athletic feats (1 Cor. 9:24–27) as metaphors for spiritual discipline was suited perfectly to the Corinthian culture. Corinth hosted numerous athletic events, including the prestigious Isthmian Games, one of four major athletic festivals of the Greeks.

The Isthmian Games were held every other year and attracted athletes from all over Greece. The competitions were between individuals, not teams, who vied more for glory than for tangible prizes. At the Corinthian games, victors were crowned with pine needle garlands, the "perishable crown" to which Paul referred (9:25).

However, when the heroes returned home, their cities might erect statues in their honor, have a parade, and write poems celebrating their feats. Sometimes a champion was even exempted from paying taxes, given free meals, and placed in the seat of honor at public events.

One of the important institutions associated with these athletic contests was the gymnasium, where young men were educated by the philosophers and trained in various physical routines. The name derived from the fact that the athletes trained and performed naked (*gymnos*, "naked"). That and the fact that gymnastic activities were closely tied to Greek culture made the institution repulsive to most Jewish people. But Paul's Corinthian readers were no doubt well acquainted with this prominent part of Greek life.

**10:12–13 PAY ATTENTION TO TEMPTATION!**

*Paul's warning to "take heed lest [you] fall" (1 Cor. 10:12) is as necessary today as it has ever been. For we, like all who have gone before us, are fallen, temptable, and subject to thinking and doing what is wrong. Few teachings of Scripture have more practical implications for day-to-day living.*

Opportunities for temptation are almost endless. And since human nature is not getting any better, nor is any of us immune to the corrupted appetites of the flesh, we need to take Paul's warning seriously and watch out for temptation, or we will surely fall. Yet Scripture offers several alternatives for dealing with temptation as we find it:

**(1)** We should avoid temptation whenever possible. Proverbs 4:14–15 urges us, "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it." Often we know beforehand whether a certain set of circumstances is likely to lead to sin. Therefore, the obvious way to avoid sin is to avoid those circumstances. Paul described a "way of escape" from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). Often the escape is to stay away from the place or the people where temptation lurks.

As believers, we can help others in this regard. We can avoid setting up situations that encourage people to do wrong. Teachers, for example, can help students avoid cheating by making assignments, giving tests, and communicating expectations in ways that reduce the need or incentive to cheat. Likewise, business owners and managers can devise procedures that don't needlessly place employees in a position where they might be tempted to steal



cash, inventory, or equipment. It's not that a teacher or employer can't trust students or employees, but that no one can trust human nature to be immune from temptation.

(2) We should flee from powerful temptations. Earlier in this letter, Paul warned the Corinthians to flee sexual immorality (6:18). Here he warned them to flee idolatry (10:14). Elsewhere he warned Timothy to flee the lust for material possessions and wealth (1 Tim. 6:9–11), as well as youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22). The message is clear: don't toy with temptation. Flee from it!

(3) Chronic temptation is something we need to confess and offer to Christ, and ask for His cleansing work. Some temptations are powerful inner struggles, with thoughts and attitudes that graphically remind us of how fallen we really are. What should we do with that kind of temptation? Rather than deny it or try to repress it, we should bring it to Christ. He alone is capable of cleaning up the insides of our minds.

(4) Finally, we must resist temptation until it leaves us. When Christ was tempted by the devil, He resisted until the devil went away (Matt. 4:1–11). James encouraged us to do the same (James 4:7). Resistance begins by bathing our minds with the Word of God and standing our ground. We have the promise, after all, that the temptations we experience will never go beyond the common experiences of others, or beyond our ability to deal with them (1 Cor. 10:13). That is great news!

#### 10:25–26 FOOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD

**Meat sold in the Corinthian meat market (1 Cor. 10:25) was meat that had been offered to the Greek gods. Thus Paul had to address the moral question of whether a believer in Christ should buy and eat such food. His conclusion: don't worry about it; the earth and all its products belong to God (10:25–26).**

Actually, **beef** was something of luxury in ancient Greece and seldom eaten on a regular basis. A far more common source of meat was **fish**. Other items in a typical meal might be **cheese, leeks, olives, wine, oil, and vinegar**. Greece raised some **wheat**, but most of its bread was made from imported grain from Egypt or Asia Minor.

In Palestine, the land of "milk and honey" (Ex. 13:5), Hebrew farmers raised a variety of cereal grains such as **wheat** and related products, **spelt, barley, and millet**. They also cultivated **cucumbers, squash, beans, lentils, leeks, onions, and garlic**. Fruits and nuts included **melons, grapes, raisins, figs, apricots, oranges, almonds, and pistachios**.

**Honey** was gathered from bees or made from **dates**. **Regional spices included mint, anise, dill, and cummin**. As in the rest of the Mediterranean, olives were plentiful. They were eaten green or ripe, or they might be pressed into oil, which was used for cooking, seasoning, and as fuel for lamps.

**Beef** and **mutton** were a common part of the daily fare in Palestine, along with **milk, butter, and cheese**. A noon meal for a workman might consist of two small loaves of **barley bread**—one filled with cheese, the other with olives.

Animals were divided into two classes by the Hebrews, clean and unclean (Lev. 11:1–47; Acts 10:9–15). Only **clean animals**—those that chewed the cud and had divided hooves—could be used for food (Lev. 11:3), except the fat (3:16–17). Pigs and camels were ceremonially unclean and therefore unfit for food. **Camel's milk** and **cheese**, however, were not forbidden.

Many kinds of **fish** could be eaten (11:9–12), but not oysters or shrimp. Some twenty different species of birds were rejected (11:13–19). Insects that had legs and leaped, such as the **grasshopper**, were fit for consumption.

The major preservative for these foods was **salt**. An abundant supply was available from the Sea of Salt, or Dead Sea, in the south. ♦

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#### HEAD COVERINGS

#### 11:2–16

Head coverings (1 Cor. 11:4–6) were an important part of first-century wardrobes. Outdoors they provided both men and women protection from the intense sun and heat, as well as rain. In addition, a woman's head covering was a sign of modesty and



commitment to her husband. Jewish and other women of the Near East wore veils in public, but Roman women never wore veils, and among the Greeks, some did and some did not. In some cultures, a woman without a veil was assumed to have loose morals.

These cultural issues came to bear on the women believers at Corinth. Controversy arose over whether they were required to keep their heads covered during worship or not. Paul wrote that the churches had no universal policy on the matter (11:16), indicating that the women had some freedom to choose how they would handle the issue.

Observing the custom to wear a covering may have been especially important in Corinth, where a favorite slogan was, "Everything is permissible" (compare 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). Paul was eager for Christians to maintain a good reputation and give no cause for offense so that people hearing the gospel would have no barriers to becoming followers of Christ.

### 11:3

What exactly did Paul mean when he used the word "head" (1 Cor. 11:3)? Some believe that the term by definition implies subordination of one person to another. Others disagree. For example, John Chrysostom, an early church leader, declared that only a heretic would understand "head" as chief or authority over. Rather, he understood the word as meaning absolute oneness, cause, or primal source.

Either way, it's important to note that while "the head of Christ is God" (11:3), Christ is elsewhere shown to be equal with God (for example, John 1:1–3; 10:30; Col. 1:15). So the term "head" need not exclude the idea of equality. At the same time, even though Christ is the equal of God, He became obedient to the point of death (Phil. 2:5–8), demonstrating that equality need not rule out submission.

### 11:25 THE NEW COVENANT

**Even a casual reader of the Bible soon discovers that it is divided into two major sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. But how many readers realize that "testament" is just another word for "covenant"? Thus the New Testament describes the new covenant (1 Cor. 11:25), or agreement, that God has made with humanity, based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

In the Bible, a covenant involves much more than a contract or simple agreement. A contract has an end date, but a covenant is a permanent arrangement. Furthermore, a contract generally involves only one aspect of a person, such as a skill, while a covenant covers a person's total being.

God entered into numerous covenants with people in the Old Testament. For example: with Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15); with Noah (8:21–22; 2 Pet. 3:7, 15); with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3); with Israel (Deut. 29:1–30:20); and with David (2 Sam. 7:12–16; 22:51).

The agreement with Israel was especially significant, because it established a special relationship between God and the Hebrews. They were made His "chosen people" through whom He would bring blessing and hope to the rest of the world. However, because the recipients of God's Law could not keep it perfectly, further provision was necessary for them as well as for the rest of humanity.

That's why God promised a new covenant through the prophet Jeremiah (see "Written on Their Hearts" at Jer. 31:31–34). Under the new covenant, God would write His Law on human hearts. This suggested a new level of obedience and a new knowledge of the Lord.

The work of Jesus Christ brought the promised new covenant into being. When Jesus ate His final Passover meal with the Twelve, He spoke of the cup as "the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20), the words that Paul quoted to the Corinthians to remind them of the need for purity and propriety in their worship (1 Cor. 11:25–34).

The new covenant in Jesus' blood rests directly on the sacrificial work of Christ on the Cross (which was prefigured by Israel's system of sacrifices) and accomplishes the removal of sin and the cleansing of the conscience by faith in Him (Heb. 10:2, 22). So every time Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper, they remind themselves that God has fulfilled His promise: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people ... I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Heb. 8:10, 12; compare Jer. 31:33–34). ♦

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*One of the striking features of God's covenant with Israel is that God is holy, all-knowing, and all-powerful, yet He consented to enter into a covenant with*



*Abraham and his descendants—weak, sinful, and imperfect as they were. See “Israel” at Rom. 10:1.*

*To gain further insight into Christ’s work of rescuing us from sin, see “Salvation—Past, Present, and Future” at Rom. 5:6–11, and “A Month-Long Journey with Jesus” in the front matter.*

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OLD:

7:1 PRACTICAL LESSONS ON MARRIAGE

**Have you ever listened in on half of a telephone conversation, trying to figure out what the whole conversation is about? That’s what we have in 1 Cor. 7—half of a very important conversation on marriage between Paul and the Corinthian believers. But we can glean many practical lessons from this passage, for marriage was undergoing profound changes then just as it is today.**

Some of the believers in the early church had married before they became Christians. They wondered whether they should divorce their unbelieving spouses in order to remarry Christians and live more wholeheartedly for Christ.

An argument could be made for that. After all, if people’s primary loyalty were now to Jesus, shouldn’t that invalidate their pre-conversion marriage vows? (Of course, it would also provide them with a convenient excuse to escape bad marriages.)

But Paul didn’t recommend that. He viewed the abandonment of one’s family as a very serious matter (1 Cor. 7:10–11), arguing that the believer should stay in the marriage as long as possible (7:12–13). However, God desires peace in relationships (7:15), and that may not be possible in a family where Christian values are not shared. If the unbeliever wants to leave, he or she should be allowed to do so (7:15).

Many churches in different cultures around the world today are faced with very similar circumstances. For example:

- the new believer who wonders what to do, since her husband isn’t interested in church or religion.
- the inner-city congregation that has members who live in common-law marriages. What should the church tell them?
- the recent immigrant who tells his pastor that he has two families, one in each of two countries. “Should I get rid of one or both of those families?” he wonders.
- a tribal chief who wants to join the church—along with his five wives. What should he do with the wives? Divorce them all? Keep one? If so, which one?

Paul offers no simple solutions for any of these situations, but he does share one piece of very good news: it is possible for one believer to “sanctify” a family, that is, to be an agent of God’s love and grace, and perhaps to eventually bring other family members into the faith. No matter how unconventional the situation might be, Scripture doesn’t counsel sudden changes. God may have work left to do in that family, and He may use the believer to do it—if he or she stays. ♦

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*God considers marriage sacred. Yet in a fallen world, some couples will break that bond. How should believers today regard divorce? Is it prohibited by the Bible? For help concerning this complex issue, see “The Bible and Divorce” at Deut. 24:1–4.*

#### A NEW VIEW OF SEXUALITY

**7:3–6** In an era when Greek women were often deprived both emotionally and sexually, Paul insisted that the Christian husband should recognize and fulfill the needs of his wife (1 Cor. 7:3–6). He declared that marriage partners have authority over each other. That means that both husband and wife were forbidden from using sex as a means of control, but were to enjoy mutuality in that aspect of their marriage.

The gospel required a different understanding of sex and marriage than the surrounding culture’s. Two thousand years later, it still does.

7:17–24 CAREER CHANGES

**Modern workers place a high value on mobility and freedom of choice. So how should Christians in our culture deal with Paul’s admonition to remain in the situation where God has called us (1 Cor. 7:17–24)?**

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<sup>8</sup> *Word in life study Bible*. (1996). (electronic ed., 1 Co 9:1–11:25). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



**That sounds terribly antiquated in a society where the average person changes careers at least four times in life. In the ancient world, people normally worked for a lifetime at the same job.**

Paul wrote that becoming a believer doesn't necessarily mean a career change. Wherever God has assigned us, that is our calling and we should pursue it to God's glory. On the other hand, there is nothing in the faith that locks a person into a work situation, any more than an unmarried woman must remain single all her life (7:8-9).

Paul's teaching about vocation parallels what he wrote about pre-conversion marriage (7:10-16). A believer is not compelled to leave his or her unbelieving spouse. On the other hand, the marriage may be dissolved if necessary to maintain peace. In the same way, believers should not use conversion as an excuse to leave their jobs.

This is an important point because Christianity introduces new values into our lives that may make us anxious to escape our work environment. The atmosphere of language and jokes, competition and politics, quotas and numbers may begin to feel uncomfortable. Wouldn't it be easier to quit one's job and go to work for a Christian employer—or better yet, pursue a career in a church or ministry? But Paul didn't encourage that choice as the normal path. A job change may be a possibility, as Jesus' disciples found out. But it is not necessarily virtuous to leave our "nets," especially if our only reason is to escape the realities of the work world.

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*Most people are not given a sign from heaven as to what God want them to do in life. Instead, they must make decisions about how best to use their God-given skills and abilities in whatever opportunities the Lord brings their way. To help you consider career changes in your own life, see "A Dramatic Career Change" at Gen. 50:24; "You are Unique" at Ps. 33:15; and "A Dramatic Career Change" at Is. 6:8-9.*

*it's actually an advantage for us to work alongside unbelievers so that we can communicate the message of Christ by how we do our jobs. See "Your 'Workstyle'" at Titus 2:9-10.*

#### 7:32-35 WOMEN AND WORK IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

**Paul's observation that a married woman must care about "the things of the world" (1 Cor. 7:34) hints at the busy lives that first century women lived, especially in the large cities of the Roman Empire.**

The New Testament shows that women carried out a wide range of tasks: for example, drawing water, grinding grain, manufacturing tents, hosting guests, governing and influencing civic affairs, making clothes, teaching, prophesying and filling other spiritual functions, burying the dead, and doing the work of slaves, to name but a few. Additional evidence from the period reveals that women also served as wool workers, midwives, hairdressers, nurses, vendors, entertainers, political leaders, and even construction workers, among many other occupations.

If a woman was among the upper classes, she enjoyed relative economic security and social privileges. According to the Roman ideal, her role in society was to marry a citizen, produce legitimate heirs for him, and manage the household according to his orders. However, by the first century few families attained that ideal.

Wealthy women used slaves to perform such household tasks as cooking, making clothes, washing laundry, and caring for children (see "Children and Childcare" at Matt. 19:14). Slaves also functioned as nurses, midwives, hairdressers, stenographers, and secretaries, and it was common for a high-ranking slave to be designated the household manager.

Female slaves were not only considered to be household property, but sexual property as well. The master of the house could legally force a slave to have sex with him, or with anyone he chose. Any children that she bore became his property. In this way a citizen could increase his number of slaves.

Women who were former slaves, or freeborn, lacked the economic security of either the citizen or the slave. Nevertheless, many women sought to buy their way out of slavery. Some of these working-class women earned their living as vendors, selling fish, grain, vegetables, clothing, or perfume. Others became wet nurses, and some chose to become entertainers or prostitutes, occupations that were considered beneath the dignity of respectable women. ◆

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*In Jewish homes, women were responsible not only for carrying out household tasks, but also for preparing the home for the Sabbath. See "Jewish Homemaking" at Mark 1:29-31.*



*Not all first-century women centered their lives around domestic responsibilities totally. Lydia was a successful businesswoman in the purple trade (see her profile at Acts 16:14–15) and Priscilla manufactured tents with her husband (see her profile at Rom. 16:3–5).*

*To gain further insight into Christ’s work of rescuing us from sin, see “Salvation—Past, Present, and Future” at Rom. 5:6–11, and “A Month-Long Journey with Jesus” in the front matter.*

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<sup>9</sup> [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., 1 Co 7:1–32). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.