

this verb (cf. 8:1, 10), and the idea of community of interests cannot be lost. Building or breaking--that is the issue in one's conduct here.

4. IS IT GLORIFYING? v. 31.

This is the ruling maxim and passion for all Christian conduct viewed vertically. It is the supreme guide for the child of God. A Christian must not ask himself: "What will be most agreeable to me, or what will best suit my interests?" but: "What will contribute most to promote God's glory?" God's "glory" by definition is the splendour of His perfections, particularly of His holiness and love, manifested in the midst of His saints. Hence, one's conduct must answer: "What will best make my brethren to understand the love and holiness of my heavenly Father and the salvation I claim through Christ's blood?" One should not forget that this verse touches upon every facet of a Christian's life: eating, drinking, and acting. It goes far beyond the simple thought of consuming some meat offered to idols!

5. IS IT OFFENSIVE? v. 32

The verb "offense" means "to give no occasion of stumbling." It is used only three times in the N.T. (here; Acts 24:16; Phil. 1:10). Three circles of persons are mentioned as ones upon whom consideration must be given: Jews, Greeks, and Christians. They constitute the major divisions of humanity as God views them. The entire human race is the issue, not alone the matter of a Christian brother's conscience. A huge obligation is laid upon the believer!

Conclusion. Paul did not seek his own "profit" (v. 33) which incidentally is the same word as "expedient" (v. 23). He aimed at the "worthwhile" aspects of life "that they may be saved" (v. 33). He stated this earlier (9:22). God help us to follow these principles like Paul and thus follow Christ (11:1). Amen.

THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

"Have We No Right?"

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Introduction

1. Christian conduct is still the issue with Paul. How does a Christian live in the midst of the evil generation in which he finds himself?

2. The general principle given is: Christlikeness (11:1). Nothing is more general yet more specific. To live in agreement with His Person and Will is the highest and most noble.

3. But to get at the core of this matter, Paul raises a group of questions. All of them give clarity to what Christlikeness will be in practice. The answers to these questions will determine the sort of conduct one will advance. Here are the questions and the conduct they elicit:-

1. IS IT WORTHWHILE? v. 23.

This is a repetition of an earlier statement (cf. 6:12). That all things are lawful obviously cannot include the practice of evil (5:1-13; 6:1-11). Matters must be "expedient." The verb used here comes from a root meaning to "bear together for good" and hence means "worthwhile." Is there a positive value and contribution--that is the question!

2. IS IT ALTRUISTIC? vv. 24-30, 33.

a. The principle vv. 24, Social relations must please the Lord. How can they? The present tense of the verb denotes a common practice of events: no one is to constantly seek his own things. Every pursuit of self-interest which is inspired by egoism is condemned. Rather, one is to keep seeking (present tense verb implied) that which pertains to others. The word "wealth" is not found in the original, but a definite article is and should be rendered "that which" (meaning: the affairs, the well-being) of the other. "The other" is employed in

contrast with oneself (cf. "the near one" in Rom. 15:2).

b. The practice, vv. 25-30. How the principle is ordered is indicated here. Two specific illustrations are offered:

1) A meal in one's own house. vv. 25, 26.

The term "shambles" is a hapax legomenon. It is a Latin word which one might expect in a Roman colony. It refers to the market place. Usually only a part of the sacrificial meat was consumed; the rest was given to the priests, the poor, or sold in the market. Anyone might easily buy meat sacrificed to idols. Paul urges: buy meat and eat it without any questions! His reason: "for conscience sake." It signifies that there is no necessity to stage an inquiry with a view to judgment at the bar of conscience. It is a championing of Christian liberty. Support for this position is garnered from the Psalms (24:1). Meat offered to idols cannot depreciate the fact that all which fills the world comes from the Lord and belongs to Him. He is deprived of nothing by this action nor are His servants. The Jews often use this verse from the Psalms as a table prayer.

2) A meal in a strange house. vv. 27-30

When one buys for himself (v. 25), the question of propriety arises in the shop; when he is a guest of another, it arises at the table. The word "disposed" is a strong verb and suggests the idea of "making up the mind." Hence, while there is no objection to attendance, Paul clearly counsels a great deal of reflection in the situation for the believer is now in a fish-bowl! A Christian may eat and not bring himself to the bar of his conscience.

Then Paul raises a hypothetical case (third class condition in Greek). The information, "This is sacrificial meat" might be volunteered by another Christian guest at the table, but whose conscience is still hampered with scruples. He is a weak brother. Then

what? Paul argues for non-participation by an emphatic present imperative and he does so on two grounds:

a) "For the sake of" the brother. The verb "showed" means to "disclose what does not appear on the surface." It does not suggest maliciousness, but a desire to help spare a companion from danger.

b) "For conscience sake" and this of the weak brother who has noted the problem. He could undergo a "conscience shock" and this would be wrong.

It might be that Paul argues for a retrogression in one's own conscience. On the contrary, he has a higher view: the strong brother voluntarily subordinates himself and his conduct to the scruples of the other to gain greater goals. This is explained in the two rhetorical questions raised:

a) What good end (what advantage) will be served by eating under the circumstances of exposing one's freedom to the censure of an unsympathetic conscience? There is nothing to be gained by the expression of liberty in such cases (v. 29).

b) Thanksgiving for food which has knowingly been devoted to an idol will be regarded as an act of sacreligious indulgence and be denounced accordingly. The verb "evil spoken of" is really blasphemy and refers to revolting hypocrisy. These two questions seek to avoid a mutual contradiction and force a non-believer to exclaim: "What sort of Christianity is this?"

3. IS IT CONSTRUCTIVE? v. 23.

The verb "edify" literally means to "build" and this is the general desire for the whole church. The body of Christ is the tacit object of the "building." Paul is concerned here with group dynamics. Spiritual advancement is embodied in