

PAUL'S AIMS REGARDING ΕΙΔΩΛΟΘΕΥΤΑ:
A NEW PROPOSAL FOR INTERPRETING
1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-11:1

by

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1. *Introduction*

What are Paul's aims in his argument on food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1-11:1)? Many proposals have been advanced.¹ On the one hand, some scholars are persuaded that Paul's ideological sympathies

¹ For a review of scholarship on the passage, see E. Coye Still, *The Rationale Behind the Pauline Instructions on Food Offered to Idols: A Study of the Relationship Between 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 and 8:1-11:1* (Ph.D. diss.; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000) 56-94. Among the works of importance are: C. K. Barrett, "Things Sacrificed to Idols," in *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982) 40-59; idem, "ΕΙΔΩΛΟΘΕΥΤΑ Once More," in *Aksun-Thyateira. A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios of Thyateira and Great Britain* (ed. G. D. Draga; London: Thyateira House, 1985) 155-8; idem, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper and Row, 1968) 187-246; Guy Berthiaume, *Les rôles du Mâgeiros. Étude sur la boucherie, la cuisine et le sacrifice dans la Grèce ancienne* (MnemosyneSup 70; Leiden: Brill, 1982); Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy* (JSNTSup 176; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999); Gordon D. Fee, "Ειδωλόθουτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10," *Bib* 61 (1980) 172-97; Bruce N. Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8-10 (A Response to Gordon Fee)," *TrinJ* 10 (1989) 49-70; Paul D. Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8-11:1* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994); Peter David Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in Its Context* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 5; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993); John C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965) 240-88; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom or the Ghetto (1 Cor. viii, 1-13; x, 23 - xi, 1)," *RB* 85 (1978) 543-74; Hans von Soden, "Sacrament and Ethics in Paul," in *The Writings of St. Paul* (ed. W. Meeks; New York: Norton, 1972) 257-68 (translation and abridgement of "Sakrament und Ethik bei Paulus: Zur Frage der literarischen und theologischen Einheitlichkeit von 1 Kor. 8-10," in *Urchristentum und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Vorträge* [ed. Hans von Campenhausen; Tübingen: Mohr, 1951] I, 239-75); Gerd Theissen, "The Strong and the Weak in Corinth: A Sociological Analysis of a Theological Quarrel," in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (ed. G. Theissen; trans. John H. Schütz [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982]) 121-42; Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* (CRINT III:1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); J. Weiss, *Der erste*

are with the knowers of Corinth, but he aims to encourage sensitivity toward the weak expressed in more cautious use of freedom.² On the other hand, it has been boldly proposed that Paul's aim is to persuade the "knowers" to abstain completely from εἰδωλόθυστα precisely because consumption of it with conscious knowledge of its history is inherently idolatrous.³

I wish to set forth a new proposal: Paul's aims are to persuade the Corinthian knowers to adopt complete non-use of their authentic right to consume food offered to idols and to prohibit participation in idolatrous temple meals. The practical result of Paul's argument is that the compliant Corinthian knower will abstain from all temple meals and from all food identified as having been offered to idols. In some cases the knowers' abstinence will amount to avoidance of idolatry; in others non-use of a genuine right. My proposal is over against the traditional view that Paul permits consumption of food offered to idols and even participation in some temple meals. My proposal is also over against the view that Paul considers inherently idolatrous any consumption of food identified as offered to idols.

2. *The Authentic Right of the Knowers*

Does Paul acknowledge an authentic right of the knowers to consume food offered to idols and even to participate in some temple meals? The right of the knowers to eat food *per se* is incontrovertible (1 Cor. 8:8; cf. 1 Cor. 10:25-26). There is not, however, universal agreement on the knowers' right to eat food identified as offered to idols. Cheung and Gooch deny the right to eat food identified as having been offered to idols, regardless of the context for consumption.⁴ Fee and Witherington deny the right to recline in the temple for a meal. Fee, for example, says, "Going to the temples is wrong twice:

Korintherbrief (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970 [1910]) XL-XLIII, and 210-67; and Wendell Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBLDS 68; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985).

² See, for example, Barrett, "Things Sacrificed," 50-52; idem, "ΕΙΔΩΛΟΘΥΣΤΑ Once More," 156; and Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols," 67.

³ Cheung, *Idol Food*, 128, maintains that Paul viewed conscious consumption of sacrificial food as a denial of exclusive allegiance to Christ—i.e., idolatry. Also Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυστα," 181-7, and Ben Witherington, "Not So Idle Thoughts About *Eidolothuton*," *TynBul* 44 (1993) 240, maintain that throughout 1 Cor. 8:1-10:23 Paul is dealing specifically with temple feast participation and ultimately bans such as fellowship with demons.

⁴ Cheung, *Idol Food*, 296; Gooch, *Dangerous Food*, 86.

it is not acting in love and (later) it is fellowship in the demonic."⁵ His meaning is that Paul discloses "later" (in 1 Cor. 10:1-22) that going to the temples, even in 1 Cor. 8:10, is objectively wrong. I have argued elsewhere that Fee and Witherington incorrectly restrict εἰδωλόθυτα to the temple setting.⁶ Even if, however, εἰδωλόθυτα did mean (Witherington) or refer to in 1 Cor. 8:1-10:23 (Fee) "an animal sacrificed in the presence of an idol and eaten in the temple precincts,"⁷ the argument that Paul does not acknowledge the knowers' authentic right does not square with the text.

First, Paul straightforwardly refers to "this authority of yours" (1 Cor. 8:9) without suggesting that it is inauthentic or that the act in which it is exercised inherently defiles the knower.⁸ The only warning deals with the effect on the weaker brother.

Second, for the analogies of 1 Cor. 8:13-9:27 to stand the knowers must have a genuine right. Paul certainly has the right to consume meat (1 Cor. 8:13). He is willing to relinquish this right, if exercising it will result in sin for a brother, not because eating is in itself sinful. Paul has the right to financial support as he labors as an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1-18). He has relinquished this right to avoid hindering the gospel (1 Cor. 9:12) and to win as many as possible (1 Cor. 9:19), not because it would be sinful for him to accept pay. The analogies break down, if the knowers' behavior in 1 Cor. 8:10 is both damaging to the brother and inherently sinful.

These textual indications of an authentic right even to participate in some meals in temples are complemented by the evidence for the strongly social dimension of some temple meals. Willis claims that "it was probably not regarded as pagan worship to participate in the various 'socials' held in temple precincts."⁹ Support for this claim exists in the Serapis invitations. Many of the invitations make reference to the table of the God.¹⁰ Some of the invitations, however, make no

⁵ Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυτα," 191.

⁶ Still, *Rationale*, 96-107.

⁷ Witherington, "*Eidolothuton*," 240.

⁸ David Horrell, "Theological Principle or Christological Praxis? Pauline Ethics in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1," *JSNL* 67 (1997) 90: "There is no hint in ch. 8 that the ἐξουσία of the strong is anything other than legitimate."

⁹ Willis, *Idol Meat*, 63. See also John Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999) 242; Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964) 279; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (GNS 6; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983) 165.

¹⁰ Three examples will suffice to show the frequency of reference to the table of the

reference to the cult other than naming the facility as the location for the meal. One meal is in celebration of a birthday: "Diogenes invites you to dinner for the first birthday of his daughter in the Serapeum tomorrow which is Pachon 26 (? or 16) from the eighth hour onward" (*P. Oxy.* 2791).¹¹ Another announces a meal with no specific reason noted for the gathering: "The exegetes requests you to dine at the temple of Demeter today, which is the 9th, at the 7th hour" (*P. Oxy.* 1485).¹² Knowledge of what precisely occurred at a given meal at Oxyrhynchus or Corinth is inaccessible. My purpose is to observe that some papyri invitations appear to be friendly to the theory that some temple meals were not necessarily idolatrous in character.¹³ I adopt this view because of the indicators in 1 Corinthians 8-9 that Paul acknowledges the authentic right of the knowers to eat food offered to idols and even recline in a temple. We may assume on *a priori* grounds and based upon 1 Cor. 10:1-22 (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9) that Paul would have condemned without delay or ambiguity what he considered inherently idolatrous. Paul does indeed appear to acknowledge the knowers' authentic right to consume food offered to idols and even participate in some meals held in temples.

god. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part I (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898) 177, translate *P. Oxy.* 110: "Chaeremon requests your company at dinner at the table [κλεινῆν] of the lord Sarapis in the Serapeum tomorrow, the 15th, at 9 o'clock." Idem, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 3 (1903) 260: "Antonius son of Ptolemaeus invites you to dine with him at the table of the lord Sarapis in the house of Claudius Sarapion on the 16th at 9 o'clock" (*P. Oxy.* 523). Idem, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 12 (1916) 244: "Apollonius requests you to dine at the table of the lord Sarapis on the occasion of the approaching coming of age of his brothers at the temple of Thoris . . ." (*P. Oxy.* 1484). See J. Grafton Milne, "The Kline of Sarapis," *JEA* 11 (1925) 8; and David Gill, "TRAPEZOMATA: A Neglected Aspect of Greek Sacrifice," *HTR* 67 (1974) 126, for the view (for which I would not argue) that even invitations which refer to the table of the god do not necessarily have sacrificial rituals in view.

¹¹ Cited in Willis, *Idol Meat*, 41.

¹² The translation is given in Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 12 (1916) 244. LSJ (1996) 593: ἐξηγητής is connected with ἐξηγέομαι and means "one who leads on, advisor."

¹³ This is not to disagree with the claim by G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri published in 1976*, vol. 1 (North Ryde, Australia: Macquarie University, 1981) 6, that we should let stand "the clear consensus that these banquets had a fundamentally religious character." We may well ask, however, what dimension of first century Corinthian life did not have a religious character? Richard E. Oster, "Use, Misuse and Neglect of Archeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 7,1-5; 8,10; 11,2-16; 12,14-26)," *ZNW* 83 (1992) 66-67, concludes prudently that monotheistic believers "could attend and participate in activities indigenous to their religio-cultural matrix but which did not require overt participation in the central *cultus* and sacrifices of the religion itself."

3. *The Limits Paul Places on the Knowers*

Of course, the knowers were not the only ones in Corinth. There are also the weak who, Paul insists, are to be given no slight consideration by the knowers. What limits does Paul seek to set on the practice of the knowers? Paul issues no prohibitions regarding consumption of market place food (1 Cor. 10:25). If, however, meat is identified during a meal hosted by an unbeliever as having been offered in sacrifice, the Corinthians are under obligation to abstain (1 Cor. 10:28). Additionally, participation in idolatrous feasts in the temples is prohibited (1 Cor. 10:21).¹⁴

Most notably, Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 8:7-9:27 appears to have the purpose of persuading the knowers toward complete non-use of their right in the matter of food offered to idols. We may conclude as much based on three observations. First, 1 Cor. 8:8 has a pronounced slant toward non-use of the right. The knowers might have employed the principle that food does not commend us to God—"food is irrelevant"—to justify use of their right to Paul or to the weak or to both. Paul, however, employs the principle for a different purpose. He does not assert the irrelevancy of food to correct the misunderstanding of the weak. If the explanation were directed to the weak as a correction in light of 1 Cor. 8:7, then one would expect, "We are no worse if we do eat, and no better if we do not." After all, eating is precisely what makes the weak view themselves as defiled. Instead Paul says, "We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better if we do." The statement is, therefore, directed to the knowers as groundwork for the call to relinquish their right: "You will not lose anything before God by giving up your right; you are not gaining anything before God by exercising your right."¹⁵ The context (1 Cor. 8:7, 9-11) implies more. The knower may lose both his weaker brother and, as a result, his own blamelessness by using the right.¹⁶ Thus they are no worse off if they do not eat, but are much worse off, if they do eat to the destruction of the brother.

Second, the warning of 1 Cor. 8:9-10 emphasizes vigilant avoidance

¹⁴ See Still, "Rationale," 187.

¹⁵ Cheung, *Idol Food*, 134, argues that the rhetorical effect of 1 Cor. 8:8 is "Do not eat!" This is too strong, although 1 Cor. 8:8 contributes to the rhetorical effect of the whole unit (1 Cor. 8:7-9:27), which is "do not eat."

¹⁶ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; New York: Scribner's Sons, 1925) 171.

of scandalizing the weak, rather than careful use of the right.¹⁷ These verses are often taken as implicitly encouraging cautious use of a right: "it is proper to eat, provided that no weaker believers are likely to see." But Paul does not say, "Use your right carefully." He says, "Beware lest this right of yours become a stumbling block to the weak," and proceeds to illustrate with a scenario in which stumbling is a real probability (1 Cor. 8:10). Lowe observes that

Logically, the prohibition of temple meals where others might see and stumble does not necessarily imply permission in cases when others would not be negatively affected. Perhaps the necessary conditions are unrealistic: given that temples are public settings, can those who wish to eat ever be confident that no weaker brother will see them? . . . Quite simply, a conditional prohibition does not necessarily constitute a permission where conditions are not in force, especially when the entire thrust of the argument has been toward restricting the behavior. To infer a permission from the obverse of 8:9 actually misreads the text as though Paul were saying, "You may eat idol meat in the temple unless someone will be scandalized."¹⁸

The fact is that Paul's argument nowhere encourages or foresees actual use of the right to eat food identified as offered to an idol.

Third, Paul's example in 1 Cor. 8:13-9:27 points to complete non-use of the knowers' right.¹⁹ 1 Cor. 8:13 sets forth the apostle's willingness to avoid entirely and permanently use of a right. If food causes Paul's brother (τὸν ἀδελφόν μου) to stumble, his solution is, "I will certainly never eat flesh again for evermore."²⁰ This is a very strong statement (οὐ μή . . . εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) which some have been tempted to qualify.²¹ Certainly to withdraw from all temple meal attendance—the

¹⁷ The construction of 1 Cor. 8:9 includes the imperative βλέπετε followed by a negative (μὴ πως) and aorist subjunctive (γένηται). The construction is employed as a warning formula in several NT texts (Matt. 24:4; Mark 13:5; Luke 21:8; Acts 13:40; 1 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 5:15; Heb. 12:25). In each case there is an evil to be avoided.

¹⁸ Chuck Lowe, *Cult and Culture: A Christian Response to Idol Food in Chinese Popular Religion* (Unpublished manuscript, n.d.) 282.

¹⁹ Brian Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic 'I': Personal Example as Literary Strategy* (JSNTSup 177; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999) 96-110; Scott Hafemann, *Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 126-33; Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 60; and others argue for exemplification as the primary function of 1 Cor. 9.

²⁰ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 173, give this translation to account for the strong negative (οὐ μή) and time reference (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα).

²¹ Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 173, suggest that this principle could lead to tyranny by the overly scrupulous and severe restriction of Christian liberty. Paul will not allow such in other contexts, such as in Col. 2:8-19 (where the legalist is the puffed up [Col. 2:18] one). If in 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1 abstinence from meat were promoted as law in a way analogous to circumcision, a different principle would be applicable.

action analogous to Paul never again eating meat (1 Cor. 8:13)—would have a profound social impact on the knowers.²² Nonetheless, the impact is not at all too great to sustain, given that exercising their right would result in the weaker brother's destruction (1 Cor. 8:11). Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 8:13 strongly implies that the knowers are called to give up entirely the practice of attending meals held in temples. "If what I eat causes my brother to sin" (1 Cor. 8:13, NIV) is a concise parallel to the whole of 1 Cor. 8:10, as the following arrangement shows:

<u>1 Cor. 8:13</u>	<u>1 Cor. 8:10</u>
... if what I eat,	If anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in a idol's temple,
causes my brother to sin...	won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?
I will never eat meat again.	

Because the weak do exist and might in fact be made to stumble, drastic action—οὐ μή . . . εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα—is warranted. 1 Cor. 8:13, therefore, states Paul's willingness to do what the knowers ought to do. Then, 1 Cor. 9:15 is a most emphatic statement in which Paul insists that he will continue his actual practice of not using his right to material support from the Corinthians. Paul probably intends for the knowers to be just as adamant as he is—"I would rather die" (1 Cor. 9:15)—about not using a right which they authentically possess. If, as I maintain, Paul is arguing for the knowers' complete non-use of their right, he probably does so because he perceives abstinence as the only certain way to avoid offending and causing the destruction of the weaker brother. The conditions to give offense (1 Cor. 8:10) will potentially exist whenever a Christian reclines in a temple. Thus, the action analogous to never eating meat (1 Cor. 8:13) and never accepting material support (1 Cor. 9:15)—i.e., never dining in the temple—is the response Paul desires from the knowers.²³

But, in 1 Cor. 8:7-9:27 the concern is not the attempt to secure salvation by the works of the Law, but the knowers' role in the salvation of other believers.

²² Still, *Rationale*, 121-6.

²³ It should be noted that some form of assistance from the Corinthians appears to have been acceptable to Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 16:6; 2 Cor. 1:16). Further, Paul did not refuse support from every church (cf. Phil. 4:14-18). Quite clearly, however, Paul was resolved never to accept the maintenance in view in 1 Cor. 9:4-18. There must, therefore, be some difference between the support of 1 Cor. 16:6 (and 2 Cor. 1:16) and

My view at this point should be distinguished from Fisk's. Fisk argues that "Paul did NOT view those dining in the temple as morally culpable (unless they scandalized someone else)."²⁴ This inference may be considered true regarding past action, but implies more latitude regarding future action than Paul's conditional statement (1 Cor. 8:10) is intended to grant. Paul uses a condition that is undetermined, but has the prospect of determination.²⁵ The knower decides his course in the face of the potential for an action to scandalize. Paul's argument is future oriented and, therefore, does not encourage the knower to act based upon retrospective analysis—"I ate at a meal in an idol's temple and no brother was scandalized, therefore I may continue carefully this practice." Neither does Paul encourage optimistic speculation—"It's unlikely that a weaker brother will see me on this occasion, so I'll attend." Paul's argument encourages the forward look which entertains the prospect of scandalizing as a real probability. The course considerate of the weaker brother is abstinence: "Since a weaker brother may observe me eating in the idol's temple, I shall abstain, lest my action (which is not inherently sinful) become sinfully destructive." Fisk views Paul as permissive of limited, on going temple meal participation. I believe Paul ends up strongly discouraging participation in all temple meals, even those which the Corinthians have the objective right to attend.²⁶ Fisk is correct regarding the knowers' possession of

1 Cor. 9:4-18. On the issue of material support, see E. A. Judge, "The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History," *JRH* 11 (1980) 213-14. Hock, *Tentmaking*, 79, note 28, suggests a distinction between hospitality and patronage or salary. He shows that Paul regularly accepted the former. Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 419, speculates that perhaps the Philippians understood that Paul's receiving of their gifts did not make him into their client. One might ask if all of this leaves open the possibility that there may be some conditions under which temple meal participation (or consumption of identified idol food) might be permissible for Corinthian knowers (since some forms of support appear to have been acceptable to Paul). I think not. In the present argument (1 Cor. 8:1-11:1) temple meal attendance is analogous to receipt of the type of support Paul will never accept from the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:15). In other words, the analogy is with the support of 1 Cor. 9:4-18; not of 16:6 or 2 Cor. 1:16. Is there the possibility that the Corinthians could assume the attitude of the Philippians and, therefore, be permitted to support Paul? Paul does not entertain the possibility and a change in his policy in Corinth would make him a liar, given 1 Cor. 9:15.

²⁴ Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols," 62.

²⁵ A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989; 10th edition) 353.

²⁶ Lowe, "Cult and Culture," 285: in 1 Cor. 8:7-13 Paul gives "the strongest pos-

an objective right, but not what Paul intends for them to do with it. Cheung is correct regarding the practical effect of Paul's argument, but not the rationale behind it.

Thus, Paul has placed real limitations on the behavior of the knowers at two points. First, he counsels against all temple meal participation. Second, he curtails indiscriminate consumption of food at meals hosted by unbelievers. The practical aim of Paul's argument is to persuade the knowers to abstain completely from food identified as offered to idols.²⁷

4. *Where is the Line?*

One of Cheung's objections to the so-called traditional view is the inability to answer the question of where the line is crossed between acceptable and unacceptable temple events.²⁸ How does the compliant knower know which temple meal invitation to accept and which to decline?

Suppose that, along with Fisk, we "imagine a continuum along which various pagan temple activities could be placed. At the one end was harmless fun and social convention; at the other end was raw idolatry."²⁹ An urgent question arises: where is the line between the two? How is one to distinguish between an idolatrous cultic feast (1 Cor. 10:21; absolutely prohibited) and a harmless temple meal (1 Cor. 8:10; permissible were it not for the danger to weak brothers)? Horrell claims that Paul "'draws the line' around the limits of acceptable involvement in pagan life and cults—yet what he does not do is define clearly which occasions he means."³⁰ Von Soden observes that "it would not

sible discouragement short of an outright prohibition." Cheung, *Idol Food*, 134, suggests that Paul employs the rhetoric of dissuasion in 1 Cor. 8:9-12.

²⁷ But Paul places the Corinthians under no obligation to investigate the history of a cut of meat in the market (1 Cor. 10:25). Berthiaume, *Les rôles du Mâgeiros*, 88-89, explains that sacrificial meat might be on sale in the market after public sacrifices or because a priest's remunerative portion was in excess of his ability to consume. Paul puts no restrictions on purchasing because the issues are neither the meat *per se* nor its history, but the weaker brother's salvation (1 Cor. 8-9; 10:23-11:1) and separation from the pagan worship which occurs during idolatrous feasts (1 Cor. 10:1-22).

²⁸ Cheung, *Idol Food*, 94.

²⁹ Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols," 63.

³⁰ Horrell, "Theological Principle," 100. Peder Borgen, "'Yes,' 'No,' 'How Far?': The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (ed. T. Engberg-Pedersen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 56, implies that there is precision in Paul's prescription: "Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 drew the boundary line just at the pagan altar table when sacrifices were performed. Apart from this, the

have been possible to delineate a sharp difference between cultic and purely hospitable or fraternal meals" because Paul does not give a detailed set of external criteria.³¹ Cheung considers inability to answer the question of when the line is crossed based on Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1 to be a fatal flaw of "the traditional interpretation" of the passage. I agree that the so-called traditional interpretation—that Paul permits the practice of participation in some temple meals and controlled consumption of identified food offered to idols—cannot adequately handle this criticism.³²

In the interpretation I have set forth, however, there is no need to mark clearly the line for actual practice. In 1 Corinthians 8-9 Paul argues for the complete non-use of an authentic right (= abstention from temple meal participation). In 1 Cor. 10:1-22 Paul argues for utter dissociation from idolatry (= prohibition of participation in idolatrous feasts). Therefore, all temple meals are unacceptable, but not all for the same reason. Some are acceptable "theologically," but unacceptable because of the danger to a brother (1 Cor. 8-9). Others are simply unacceptable theologically (1 Cor. 10:1-22). Paul's argument has, therefore dealt decisively with all temple events. There is no temple event in which the Corinthian who is compliant with the apostle's instructions will participate. Thus, although the line exists theoretically somewhere along the spectrum, the question, "Where is the line?" is irrelevant to Corinthian practice.³³ Discussion of the line's location is a quagmire Paul's argument avoids.

belief in the one God, the Creator, allowed the possibility of eating sacrificial food either in an idol's temple or at home." Does this mean that "when sacrifices were performed" the entire event is off limits or that only the portion of the event during which sacrifices were performed is off limits? If the latter, then how is the instruction to be implemented practically? Is the Christian to wait in the wings until a signal confirms that all ritual has ended and he or she may enter to enjoy the bounty from the god's table? The question remains: at what point is there adequate dissociation of meat from idolatry for consumption to be permitted (given the discussion of 1 Cor. 10:1-22)?

³¹ Von Soden, "Sacrament and Ethic," 264.

³² Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols," 64, argues that "the worship of the group determines the nature of the act of the individual. Paul's urgent warning is that, by participating in a meal alongside pagans who are engaged in idol worship, Christians become guilty of idolatry by association; in fact, they become sharers in demon worship (10:20)." The argument is true as far as it goes, but stops short of a precise definition of what constitutes idol worship. Precise definition is needed in the traditional interpretation of Paul's argument, in which it is held that actual participation in some temple meals is permitted provided no weak brothers are present to see.

³³ Or, it could be said that for practical purposes the line is drawn outside all pagan temple facilities and is not to be crossed, although the reasons for not crossing may be different on different occasions.

5. *Conclusion*

As far as I know the proposal which I have made is a new one. It recognizes the strengths of leading previous interpretations of Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1. Mine is, however, more than a synthesis of previously advanced antitheses. The view that Paul's aims are to persuade the knowers to adopt complete non-use of their authentic right to consume food offered to idols and to prohibit participation in idolatrous temple meals squares with the text itself.



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