

“however, I don't mean your conscience but that of the other person. You say, ‘Why should my freedom be determined by someone else's conscience? If I participate with thankfulness, why am I criticized over something for which I myself bless God?’” (vs. 29-30, CJB).

“not your conscience, I mean, but his. ‘What?’ you say. ‘Is my freedom to be called in question by another’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I blamed for eating food over which I have said grace?’” (vs. 29-30, REB).

“by his own conscience, I mean, not yours. ‘What,’ you say, ‘is my freedom of action to be called in question by another’s conscience? If it is with thanksgiving that I partake of such food, why should I incur reproach over that for which I give thanks?’” (vs. 29-30, God’s New Covenant-Cassirer).

Both the employment of vs. 29b-30 as impersonization via a hypothetical “I,” with Paul addressing why a Believer has to be careful with his or her liberty, or a quotation or reference to what the Corinthians had been communicating to Paul, certainly lessen the potential problems that exist if Paul himself had been blatantly caught violating the principles of the Apostolic decree. Still, even with vs. 29b-30 possibly separated out in English translation in quotation marks “ ”, Paul might have been stating something that was only in the minds of those Corinthians who incorrectly believed “All things are permitted.”

31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the [assembly] of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the *profit* of the many, so that they may be saved.

10:31-33 Born again Believers cannot just do anything, as Paul makes it clear, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (v. 31). Living fully for God is the thrust of the Deuteronomy 6:4-5 *Shema*, and as David exclaims in Psalm 63:1, “O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” With *doxan Theou* (δόξαν θεοῦ) in view, there are obviously limits as to how far one can go with fellowshiping or interacting with non-Believers. In many cases, while the invitation to eat at the home of a non-Believer’s table would be good, as one could share the gospel, the chance that it would negatively affect others, could require it to be turned down.

When born again Believers conduct themselves in a manner that brings glory to God, then it is conducted with the prime example of Yeshua the Messiah, particularly as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53:11-12), in conscious attention. Eating or drinking or performing any other actions take place, with care for others’ needs and edification being imperative (Romans 15:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Philippians 2:1-22). Noting the presence of “glory” or *doxa* in v. 31, Thiselton further elaborates,

“In this epistle Paul at times uses the word δόξα, **glory**, in its Hebrew sense (LXX translation of כבוד *kabod*) as that which makes something *impressive, weighty, or radiant with splendor* (1 Cor 15:40, 41, 43)...Yet for Paul, as for John, that which most startingly displays God’s impressive splendor is precisely his self-giving in which the Lord of glory is crucified (2:8). The biblical background is enhanced by the prominence of the categories of honor and shame which characterized Corinthian culture and the Graeco-Roman world.”¹¹⁸

Paul is concerned with the Corinthians not unnecessarily offending anyone, directing them, “Give no offense either to Jewish or Greek people or to God’s community” (v. 32, TLV). He recognizes for himself, how “I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved” (v. 33, NRSV), showing them appropriate honor (cf. Romans 12:10), a resource which is too frequently not shown to one’s fellow human beings. But even while a level of self-identification with a potential audience is good (cf. 9:19-23), it is obviously something that has to be kept within appropriate boundaries. Everything that one does in terms of seeing people brought to salvation must be done via the rubric of imitating Yeshua (11:1). In the estimation of a commentator like Witherington,

“Paul strives to fit in with everyone...not for his own benefit so that things will go smoothly for himself, but in order to save many for Christ. He is not trying to be a people-pleaser in a way that would amount to compromising the gospel, but in indifferent matters such as food he is more than happy to be socially easy to get along with.”¹¹⁹

To a figure like the Apostle Paul, not causing unnecessary offense meant eating what was served to oneself, after having accepted an optional invitation, to eat at the home of a non-Believer (v. 27). No questions were to be asked as to where the meat served originated, which meant that it could very well have been sacrificed to idols (or been from unclean animals). Only when it became public knowledge, was meat to be refused (v. 28). If any temporary infraction of the Torah’s dietary code took place, then it was because of the much higher issue of demonstrating gratitude to one’s pagan host, as Paul says, “I don’t just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved” (v. 33, NLT).

Excursus: Eating What is Served Before You

In my family’s experience in being involved in the Messianic movement since 1995, and being involved in full time ministry since 2002, one would think that among all the passages surrounding the topic of “kosher,” Mark 7:1-23 or Acts 10:1-48 or Colossians 2:16-23 or 1 Timothy 4:1-5 would have witnessed the most controversy. Actually, the one statement that has witnessed more tension than any other has been Paul’s assertion of 1 Corinthians 10:27, “If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience’ sake.” This is not only true of what it meant for Paul’s ancient readers, but most especially for how it is to be, or at least can be, applied in a Twenty-First Century context.

¹¹⁸ Thiselton, 793.

¹¹⁹ Witherington, pp 228-229.

Yeshua the Messiah Himself directed His ancient followers, “Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you” (Luke 10:8). When His followers would travel around the countryside, declaring the good news of the Kingdom, they would have often been at the mercy of others for beneficence. In being welcomed into various homes, they needed to be very grateful for whatever hospitality was shown them. And so Yeshua said, “Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages” (Luke 10:7a). These homes, however, would have been Jewish homes, where the Torah’s dietary code would have been honored.

The Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:25-33, concerning a responsible exercise of a Believer’s liberty, were delivered with a similar intention. The acceptance of an invitation to a non-Believer’s home to dine was so that some kind of a relationship could be developed, with the specific intention of seeing others brought to saving faith in Israel’s Messiah.

In discussing my personal evaluation that when Paul says “eat anything that is set before you without asking questions” (v. 27), that this would mean that when served meat sacrificed to idols, the Corinthians would have to eat it—including beef, lamb, goat, various fowl, *or* pork—I can tell you that I have been criticized a few times from rigid adherents to a One Law/One Torah ideology. They have retorted to me that the issue is exclusively meat sacrificed to idols, and not one of clean and unclean. They are right to point out how many of the animals involved in Greco-Roman sacrifice would have been listed as “clean” in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. They seemingly forget, though, that swine were used in such religious practices as well (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:47). These Believers were not to directly inquire as to the source of the meat served them, meaning they were not to inquire *what meat* it would be either. Sometimes beef, lamb, goat, or pork is visibly indistinguishable when cooked—and depending on how it is cooked, can be indistinguishable to the taste of many palates. Claiming that only eating the flesh of animals classified as clean, yet had been sacrificed to idols, but not eating the flesh of animals classified as unclean, makes little sense when these Believers would be served something from their pagan host, which they were not to ask questions about.

Quite contrary to this, I have had much better discussions with various Messianic Jewish colleagues, particularly those who have been involved in missionary outreaches to under-developed countries and regions. These are people who do keep a kosher-style of diet, and they do not believe that the Torah’s code of clean and unclean meats has been abrogated in the post-resurrection era. Yet, these people, in recognizing the hospitality that a non-Believer—perhaps still engrossed in a tribal paganism—would have in presenting a meal to a foreign guest with a foreign religion, eat what is set on his or her plate by the host. Whether it be pork, shellfish, or insects, the fare is eaten with no questions asked. This does not mean that the missionary asks for more. Nor does it mean that if the missionary has the option of choosing what to eat and what not to eat, that obviously unclean things are consumed. And with 1 Corinthians 10:14-33 recognized, when it is discovered that the meat was involved with a pagan ritual, it is then refused as a high violation of Biblical directives.

Obviously, for some in the Messianic community, eating unclean things served by one’s host, with particular circumstances in play and as a matter of respecting another’s hospitality, is something entirely unacceptable. These persons would apparently have an issue with the tenor of Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 10, where the venue of eating a meal at the home of a non-Believer is in view, and the need to develop relationships for

another's potential salvation would be imperative. Fare is only to be refused, according to Paul, when it becomes publicly known that meat was once an idol sacrifice.

Others in the Messianic community, while not at all “looking for loopholes” around eating kosher—similar to the Corinthian Believers eating in a pagan home—find it necessary to just eat whatever their host sets before them out of accepting their genuine hospitality. Temporarily suspending things like kosher eating, for the needs of the moment, may be necessary.

It is tactful to recognize that Paul's word, “eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake” (v. 27), would sit to the Left of Center of the stipulations of the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:20, 29). But, this is a far cry from the ancient Corinthians participating in sins such as idolatry, to the point of eating any kind of meat that was knowingly sacrificed to idols, which was to Paul unacceptable. **It was a bad witness to non-Believers** once a Believer found out the meat originated from the pagan temple. Many of us today, however, when visiting the home of a non-Believer we are trying to get to know, might have pork or shellfish served to us on a plate. While some might choose to eat around the meat, and may actually be able to say that “This disagrees with our stomach,” a situational prudence as a matter of gratitude to one's host, might require some to simply eat without complaining.

Such a thought—that *Messianic Believers* if served *unkosher fare* might have to eat it—does run contrary to the sentiments of many in today's Messianic movement, for whom keeping the kosher dietary laws is sometimes put on par with basic morality and love for neighbor. Nowhere did the Apostle Paul allow for the Corinthians to participate in idolatry, which is a capital offense in the Torah. Eating unclean things is *not* a capital offense, however, as the Lord only says, “You shall not eat any abomination” (Deuteronomy 14:3, ATS), ultimately placing one's being “abhorrent” (NJPS)¹²⁰ as a personal condition. Eating unclean things set before oneself is considered by the Scriptures themselves to be on a different level than committing idolatry and denying the God of Israel. At the very most, would any Corinthians be served unclean things, the worst thing they would really experience could be indigestion, and a state of temporary uncleanness—the same as any of us today.

The Torah does not classify what one eats at the level of high offenses like idolatry, sexual immorality, or murder. And, unless one holds to an impossibly rigid application of Moses' Teaching, there are life exceptions to the rules of *kashrut*, as indicated by the conditional invitation of Corinthian Believers being asked to the home of a non-Believer (10:27-28)—an invitation which *could* have been turned down by many of them. **Nowhere** in 1 Corinthians 10 does Paul uphold the slogan “All things are permitted” (v. 23), because he certainly does not allow—once it is discovered—for the Corinthians to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Unfortunately in much of contemporary Christianity, the maxim of “All things are permitted” now includes much, much more than what one might be served at a non-Believer's dinner table.

My family has kept a Biblically kosher or kosher-style of diet since 1996, eliminating pork and shellfish from what we eat, as well as being sensitive to various Messianic Jewish concerns.¹²¹ In our two decades of eating this way, we have, like many Messianic

¹²⁰ Heb. *toei'vah* (תוֹעֵבָה).

¹²¹ This is addressed more fully in Chapter 7 of the *Messianic Kosher Helper*, “Our Family Experiences Going Kosher” by Margaret McKee Huey.

people, undoubtedly been served things at a family member's or friend's house or at some other social gathering, which has had pork or shellfish as an unknown ingredient. *By far, the bulk of Messianic people eating something unclean takes place because it is unknown.* Only on a small handful of occasions, normally in the home of an unreligious person—who would not understand the kosher dietary laws for any man or woman of faith—have I eaten pork, when it has been served to me. Like Paul would direct, I thank the Lord for His bounty (v. 26), and I do not ask questions (v. 27), **but** I do not seek seconds. To make too much of an issue about what I am eating, could be taken by one's hosts to be ungrateful for the time and effort they have spent in providing a meal for me. And which is worse: for *me* to be concerned about *my* eating, or not being concerned about the honor **they** deserve as human beings? While it behooves one who emulates Yeshua (11:1) to obey the Father's Instruction—the command to love neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) has a higher priority than *kashrut*.

Perhaps in the future as relationships are developed, *your* eating preferences can be discussed, along with a whole range of other Biblical issues. But, for a short moment, **the other person's** hospitality has to be respected.