

Sunday, June 4, 2017—I Corinthians 10:18-23 Lawful Does Not Equal Expedient or Edifying

Introduction

- Last Sunday we looked in detail at the paragraph found in verses 14 through 17. In this section Paul instructs the Corinthians to “flee from idolatry” and begins to ask them a series of rhetorical questions highlining why this is the case or the only logical conclusion for them.
- At the end of last week’s message, we cruised through verses 18 through 22. By way of introduction today, I would like to go back and make sure we understood some of the highpoints of this section.

I Corinthians 10:18

- Once again Paul uses Israel as an example of the truth he is seeking to communicate in verses 16 and 17. The Levitical priests ate of the sacrifices which they offered upon the alter.
 - I Corinthians 9:13
 - Levities 7:6, 15
- The fact that they ate the sacrifices made them partakers of and identified them with the altar. Likewise, partaking in the communion of the blood and body of Christ in verse 16 makes one a member of the one bread in verse 17.

I Corinthians 10:19

- Paul reverts to the rhetorical questioning of verse 16. Paul has already said earlier in I Corinthians that an idol is “nothing in the world.”
 - I Corinthians 8:4

I Corinthians 10:20

- Paul renders his conclusion with a strong adversative statement, “But this I say.” While the idol is “nothing” the Gentiles are sacrificing unto devils when they offer this upon the idols alter. In other words, their spiritual mind set is that they are worshiping and paying homage to something other than God almighty.
 - Romans 1:19-21, 25
- I Corinthians 10:20—Paul does not want the Corinthians to have “fellowship” with devils. It is very interesting that he was say that in verse 20 given our discussion last week of “communion” in verse 16.

- I Corinthians 10:18—the English word “partakers” come from the same Greek word that is rendered “fellowship” in verse 20. When Israel partook of the alter they were in “fellowship” with what that alter stood for and represented. Likewise, Paul does not want believers to be in “fellowship” with devils by being involved in the Gentiles idolatry.
- Even though idols and that which is sacrificed unto them are “nothing” to believers, it is devil worship for those who are offering the sacrifices.

I Corinthians 10:21

- Notice that this verse is comprised of two “ye cannot” statements. “Ye” the Corinthians “cannot” drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils at the same time. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the English word “cannot” as follows:
 - “An inability to do a thing; an impossibility; (also) a statement that something cannot be done.”
 - Matthew 6:24
- The expression translated “cannot” means that the Corinthians do not have the strength, ability, or power to “partake” in the Lord’s table and the table of devils. In other words, it is not possible to do both at the same time.
 - I Corinthians 10:17
- II Corinthians 6:15-16—the thought of worshiping Christ and devils is abhorrent to the Apostle Paul.
- Colossians 1:18—Christ is the preeminent one.

I Corinthians 10:22

- Verse 22—Paul finishes the paragraph by asking two more rhetorical questions. For one to say they are a believer while they continuously eat that which was been offered in sacrifice unto demons is a provocative act in the sight of God.
 - Exodus 20:3-5
 - Deuteronomy 32:21
- I Corinthians 1:25—provides an answer to Paul’s second question. We are NOT stronger then the Lord. For one to presume that he can worship both God and demons at the same time is to make himself stronger than God.

I Corinthians 10:23

- Inserts the elements of grace into this discussion of idolatry. All things are lawful in the sense that believers today living during the dispensation of grace are not under the law.
- According to Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) the English word "lawful" carries the following meanings:
 - Agreeable to law; conformable to law; allowed by law; legal; legitimate. That is deemed *lawful* which no law forbids, but many things are *lawful* which are not expedient.
 - Constituted by law; rightful; as the *lawful* owner of lands.
- During the earthly ministry of Christ, the question of lawfulness came up all the time as the Lord interacted with the Pharisees. In all of the verses we are going to look at., the question of lawfulness was being asked with respect to the Mosaic Law.
 - Matthew 12:2-4, 10-12
 - Luke 14:3
 - Luke 20:22
- I Corinthians 10:23—how is it that Paul could even think about stating that “all things are lawful unto me? Because he knew that he was no longer under that law system.
 - Romans 6:14
 - Colossians 2:14—living under grace, with the law having been taken out of the way, there was nothing that was unlawful for the Apostle Paul.
- *but all things are not expedient*—note the contrast “but” at the beginning of the second phrase. Just because all things are lawful does not mean that they are “expedient.”
- Noah Webster records the following meanings for the English word “expedient.”
 - Literally, hastening; urging forward. Hence, tending to promote the object proposed; fit or suitable for the purpose; proper under the circumstances. Many things may be lawful, which are not *expedient*.
 - Useful; profitable.
- Likewise, the dictionary defines “expedience” as:

- Fitness or suitableness to effect some good end or the purpose intended; propriety under the particular circumstances of a case. The practicability of a measure is often obvious, when the *expediency* of it is questionable.
- The question of expediency is really a question of profitability. The same Greek word translated “expedient” is also translated “profitable” in other places throughout the New Testament.
 - Matthew 5:29-30
 - Acts 20:20
 - I Corinthians 10:23, 33
- I Corinthians 6:12—just because the law has been taken out of the way and “all things are lawful” does not mean that all things are expedient or profitable.
- I Corinthians 10:23—just because something is lawful does not mean that it is good for your edification.
- Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* defines the verb “edify” as the following:
 - To build, in a literal sense. [Not now used.]
 - To instruct and improve the mind in knowledge generally, and particularly in moral and religious knowledge, in faith and holiness.
 - Edify one another (I Thess. 5:11)
 - To teach or persuade. [Not used.]
- Just because something is “lawful” does not mean that it builds up spiritually speaking.
 - Romans 15:2—“edification” = “A building up, in a moral and religious sense; instruction; improvement and progress of the mind, in knowledge, in morals, or in faith and holiness.” (*Webster’s 1828*) (I Cor. 14:3)
 - Ephesians 4:12, 16, 29—“edifying” = “Building up in Christian knowledge; instructing; improving the mind.” (*Webster’s 1828*)
- I Corinthians 10:23—there may not be any law against idolatry for believers living during the dispensation of grace but it is certainly not expedient/profitable and it certainly does not edify.

- I Corinthians 6:12—as believers we need to get past the question of is something lawful or permissible and deal with the following questions instead:
 - Is it expedient? Is it profitable?
 - Does it edify?
 - Am I allowing it to have power over me?