

together with them (1 Corinthians 7:12–14). Inasmuch as it depends on the believer, Paul encourages them to remain in the marriage.

10:23–11:1 All of chapters eight through ten address the issue of eating meat offered to idols. This seems like an odd issue in our day. However, in first-century Corinth the only fresh meat available had likely been ceremonially dedicated to pagan idols.

Those with mature Christian knowledge were aware that such “gods” were fictitious. Since they do not exist, offering meat to them was ultimately meaningless and believers were free to eat the meat (8:4–6, 8; a “yellow light”). True enough, Paul responds, but not every one knows this (8:7). Some



The Temple of Apollo at Corinth

of the Corinthian believers were still troubled by the existence of the so-called gods they previously worshipped. If eating the meat knowingly causes such a fellow believer to stumble in his or her faith, the one who eats it sins against Christ (8:11–12). The principle at work here is that it is more important to act with love and concern for others for whom Christ also died, than to selfishly exhibit or even flaunt one's personal freedoms. The loving tactic is to give up one's freedoms willing them up if doing so will benefit or avoid causing harm to others.

In chapter nine Paul points out that he himself provided that example while in Corinth. He was entitled to wages from the Corinthians for his work among them. The leaders who care for God's people spiritually should be provided for materially by them (9:14). However, Paul boasts he gave up that to which he was properly entitled. He also willingly adapted his own outward conduct in order to reach different groups of unbelieving people. A wonderful summary of Paul's attitude toward his entire ministry is in 9:19–23; he declares, “I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some” (9:22).

Believers need to be careful how they handle these “yellow light” issues. Paul uses the analogy of athlete training for a race (9:24–25). Even Paul had to discipline his own body continually (9:26–27). As a further example or **type**, Paul notes that the vast majority of the Israelites who were rescued from Egypt did not make it to the promised land (10:6). Our freedom as God's people should not cause us to become complacent in times of temptation but to take the way out provided by God himself (10:13).

The specific issue at hand in Corinth had created a fine line between eating meat dedicated to an idol, even in the home of a guest, and engaging in worship

of the idol to whom it was offered. If one's participation in a meal crosses over the line into worship of pagan gods, the conduct is in fact demonic and must be avoided (10:20; "red light").

In his summation at the end of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul returns to the words of chapter 6. Yes, everything is permissible, but that is not the only, or even the main, issue. The more critical matter concerns what is constructive for one's own faith walk and, just as importantly, for the good of others. Based on Psalm 24 Paul, in effect, says something like this:

Everything is God's creation, so enjoy the meat; eat and drink to his glory. But if someone makes a point about the meat having been offered to an idol, refrain from eating it so as not to offend the other person. Yes, you are free to eat the meat and should not be condemned for it, but your greater concern for a fellow believer should cause you to focus on others rather than self.

Paul concludes by urging the Corinthians to imitate him because he has followed the example of Christ (11:1).

It is true that 1 Corinthians 8–10 addresses an obscure and outmoded topic. But the principles Paul lays out here apply very well to many contemporary issues. These chapters provide a model for dealing with any number of "yellow light" issues that are not right or wrong in and of themselves—issues that are neither specifically pleasing nor displeasing to God. Examples today include dancing, music, movies, clothing, the use of alcohol by those of legal age to consume it, and many more. Christians are generally free to engage in or abstain from such activities. Yet many of these same things can be abused to the harm of self and/or cause stumbling to the faith of others. Their propriety largely depends upon how they are used.

Dancing serves as a good illustration. On the one hand, there are certainly many kinds of "dirty dancing" which displease God, cause people to stumble, and inevitably lead to sin. These are "red lights." On the other hand, the Bible often calls God's people to dance for joy before the Lord in worship (Psalm 149:3; 150:4). This is a "green light." But dancing, in and of itself, is neutral. Most dancing probably lies between those two and fits in the "yellow light" category introduced above. Believers are free to engage in it without sin, but must also watch how their conduct is affecting themselves and others.

11:17–30 This is Paul's only discussion of the Lord's Supper in all his letters. The topic arises because of its abuse in Corinth. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the celebration of a Passover meal. The early believers appropriately continued to share the Lord's Supper in the context of a larger meal, sometimes called an **agape feast** (Jude 12). However, in Corinth they are doing so inappropriately. The problem of divisions addressed in the first four chapters resurfaces here, but now in terms of the rich and the poor (1 Corinthians 11:18). According to 1 Corinthians 11:20–22, during the meal the rich are overindulging themselves while excluding the poor but then sharing with the poor in the Lord's Supper. Such conduct shames the poor and despises the community of believers.