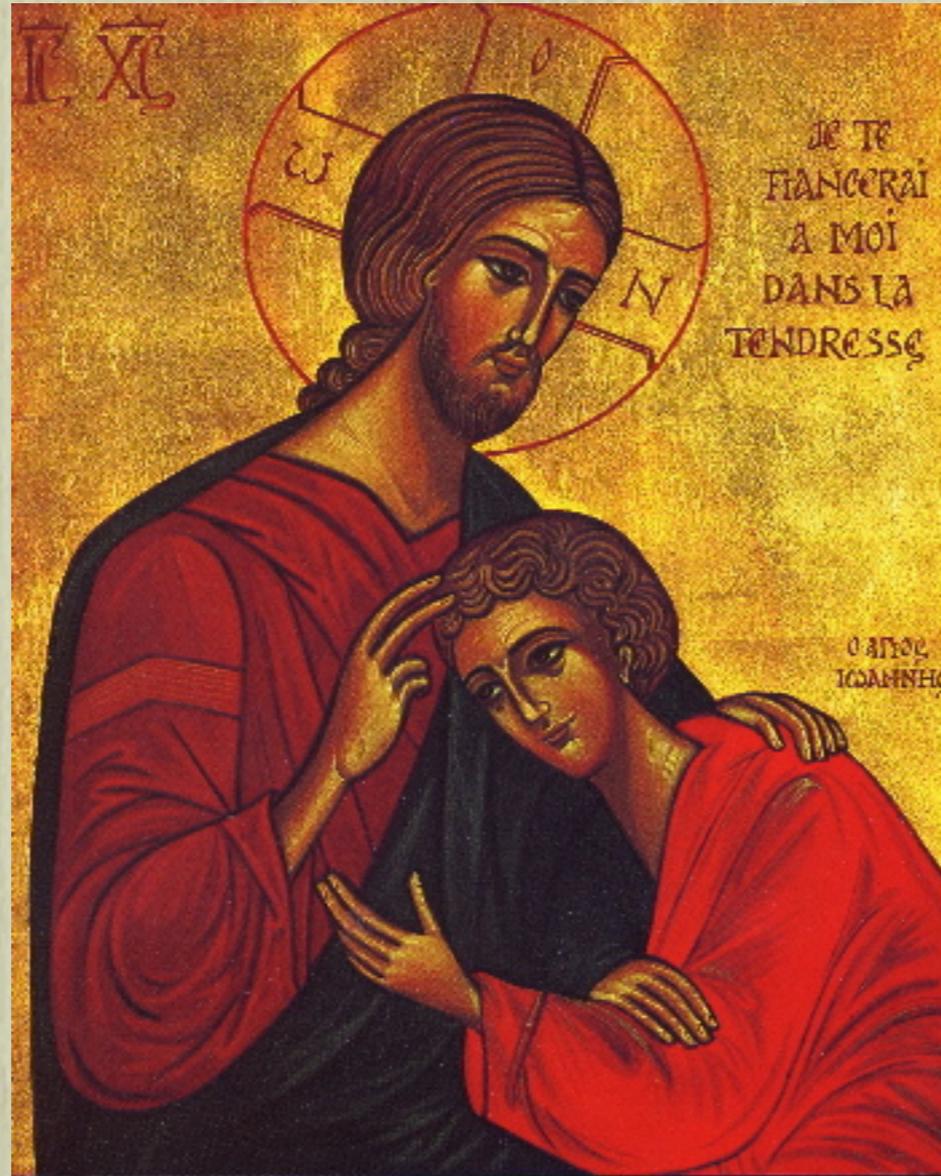


05. 1 Corinthians 8:7 – 11:1



I Corinthians 8:7-11

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their **conscience**, being weak, is defiled. Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that your insistence on exercising your rights does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you [singular], who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those **weak believers for whom the Messiah died** are destroyed.

1 Corinthians 8:12-13

But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against the Messiah. [scandal - Luke 17:1-2] Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Paul is concerned for the 'little ones'. He stresses the fact that to sin against their weaker brethren is to sin against Jesus himself. We are at the heart of Paul's conversion experience; 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting' (Acts 9:5).

Concern for the truth must prevail, so long as we remember that the ultimate truth is that God is love and that he draws each of us to himself where we are. All parties must be challenged to be sensitive to this. Only love can build up a community – the love which Jesus had for us when he gave his life for us.

1 Corinthians 9

Paul has just been suggesting to the Corinthians that in the cause of love they renounce their right to eat food that has been offered to idols. He concluded by saying that if eating such food were to cause another to sin, he himself would certainly refrain from doing so (8:13), so precious is the salvation of those for whom Jesus died (8:11). He devotes the whole of this chapter to reminding them of the rights which he has willingly decided not to exercise, the better to carry out the commission given him by God. His key point seems to be that just because we have rights it does not mean that we have to insist on exercising them. Underlying this whole section is the challenge: if I have given up so much for the gospel and for love of you, cannot you forgo your rights for the sake of your brothers and sisters in the faith?

1 Corinthians 9:1-7

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord
Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at
least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
This is my defence to those who would examine me. Do we not have
the right to our food and drink? Do we not have the right to be
accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the
brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who
have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who at any time
pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard
and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not
get any of its milk?

It appears from what Paul says here that Cephas's wife (see Mark 1:30)
remained with him on his missionary journeys and that James was
not the only one of Jesus' family to be actively involved in the early
church.

1 Corinthians 9:8-14

Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4). Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but **we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.** Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:15-18

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case. Indeed, I would rather die than that – no one will deprive me of my ground for boasting! If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

Paul's salary, if one wants to use such language, is precisely to have no salary. That is why, unlike the other apostles, he supports himself by his own manual work. This is a deliberate choice, but it is a choice he makes in obedience to the commission given to him. For him it is an essential part of proclaiming the gospel. Why this is so he will now explain.

1 Corinthians 9:19-22

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under the Messiah's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

Paul is faithful to Judaism, though he learned from his Lord that obedience to God required that he be free not to follow the law when to do so would mean resisting the Spirit of Jesus guiding him to love. This is 'the Messiah's law.' Like his Lord, it was the needs of the weak that especially drew him. It must be the same for the Corinthians!

1 Corinthians 9:23-27

I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? (The Isthmian games, 51AD). Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

‘You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another’ (Galatians 5:13).

Paul goes on to warn them against being too over-confident.

Religious Experience does not guarantee salvation.

Their determination to eat idol meat is not only causing scandal to the weak. It is also putting their own salvation at risk.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

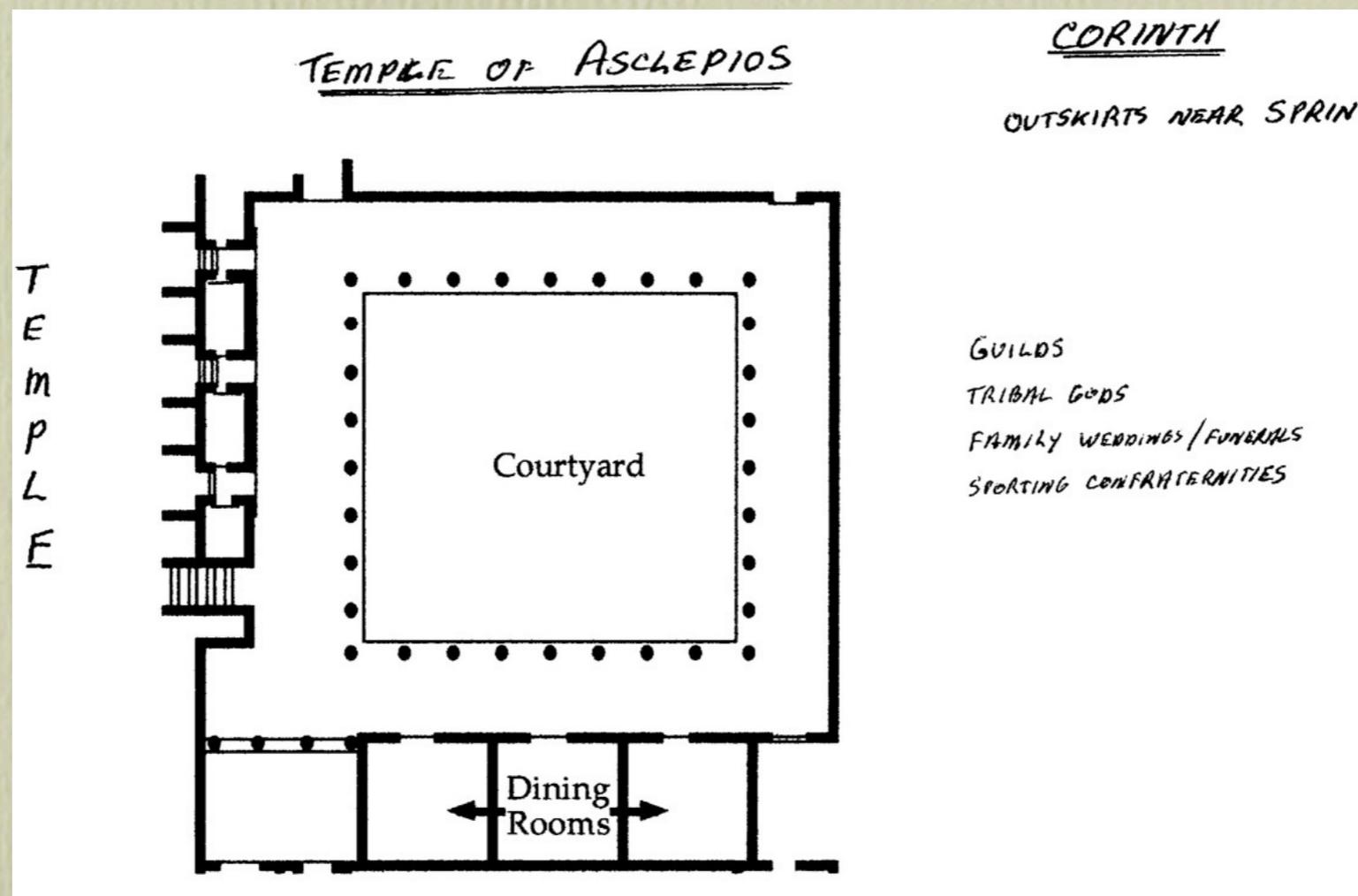
I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Messiah. [typology What the rock (God) was for the Israelites, the Messiah is for us]. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. [because of idolatry!]

1 Corinthians 6:6-13

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play” (Exodus 32:6). We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day (Numbers 25). We must not put the Messiah to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents (Numbers 21:5-6). And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer (Numbers 14:36-37). These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

I Corinthians 10:14-15

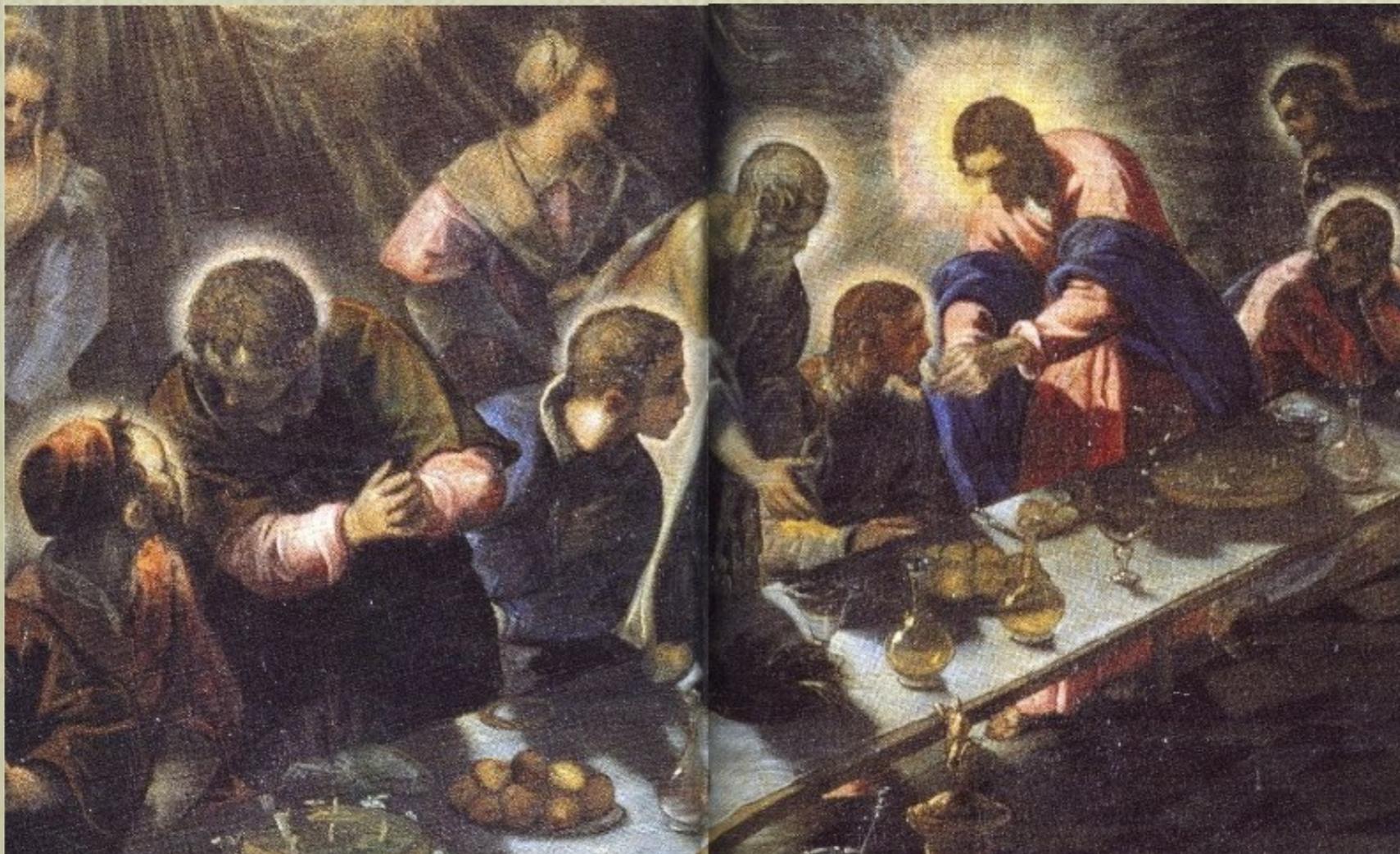
Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.



1 Corinthians 10:16-17

By way of contrast with the cultic meals shared in a pagan temple, Paul goes on to speak of the Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion [κοινωνία] in the blood of the Messiah? The bread that we break, is it not a communion [κοινωνία] in the body of the Messiah? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.



Paul is surely speaking of the communion which they have with Jesus himself who poured out his life's blood for us on the cross, and who gave himself for us in all the many ways that he relates to us as man, in his human existence (his 'body'). It is our being in communion with Jesus' self-giving as man (his 'body') that binds us into one community and therefore into one 'body' (see 6:15) with all the other participants in the Eucharist.

1 Corinthians 10:18-22

Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

‘All things are lawful’ (they claim)

(Paul’s response): **but not all things are beneficial.**

‘All things are lawful’ (they claim)

(Paul’s response): **but not all things build up.**

Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.

1. Buying meat in the market. **Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, For ‘the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s’**(Psalm 24:1).

2. Eating in someone’s home. **If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice’, then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience — I mean the other’s conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else’s conscience?**

I Corinthians 10:30 - 11:1

If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.

11:1 Be imitators of me, as I am of the Messiah.

Paul offers his own example for their imitation, and explains why: he wants them to imitate him, because he is imitating Christ. Paul's solution to the problem facing the Corinthian church is to draw them with him to the foot of the cross, so that together they can contemplate him who made of his life an offering to others in love.