

## A Prayer From *The Imitation of Christ*

Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471))

Let Your name, not mine, be praised. Let Your work, not mine, be magnified. Let Your holy name be blessed, but let no human praise be given to me. You are my glory. You are the joy of my heart. In You I will glory and rejoice all the day, and for myself I will glory in nothing but my infirmities.

Let the Jews seek the glory that comes from another. I will seek that which comes from God alone. All human glory, all temporal honor, all worldly position is truly vanity and foolishness compared to Your everlasting glory. O my Truth, my Mercy, my God, O Blessed Trinity, to You alone be praise and honor, power and glory, throughout all the endless ages of ages.

January 6, 2023

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### Doing All Things to the Glory of God

Kevin T. Bauder

In 1 Corinthians 8–10 the apostle Paul addresses the question of whether Christians should eat meat that has been offered to idols. In chapter 8 his general answer is that an idol is nothing in the world. If an idol is nothing, then meat that has been offered to idols has literally been offered to nothing. To say that it has been offered to nothing is equivalent to saying that it has not been offered at all. Consequently, meat that has been offered to idols is just meat and may be safely eaten.

Nevertheless, Paul places an important caveat on implementing this conclusion. Even supposing that eating this meat is completely morally innocuous, some Christians still have qualms of conscience about it. Some people are keenly conscious of the idolatrous worship that provoked the offering of the meat. They may perceive eating the meat as idolatry-at-a-distance. For them to eat would be to transgress their consciences, and violating one's conscience is not a good habit to form.

If it is not possible to eat this meat without transgressing the conscience, then one should not eat the meat. Furthermore, one should not eat the meat if eating would induce fellow believers to violate their consciences. We are responsible not only to protect our own consciences but also the consciences of our sisters and brothers. In view of this principle, Paul makes the radical assertion that if eating meat causes his brother to stumble, he will consume no flesh as long as the world stands.

We might think that this statement was intended as a hyperbole, a fantastic exaggeration to emphasize a point. If that is what we think, then we are wrong. The entire next chapter (1 Cor 9) is Paul's extended explanation of how he is not hyperbolizing at all. Quite the contrary, he already practices similar disciplines in his ministry. As an example, Paul builds an extended case for why he, in ministering the gospel, has a right to expect compensation. He bases this case on Old Testament examples and principles, on the apostolic pattern, and even on common-sense natural law arguments. Then he makes it clear that, even though he has a right to expect compensation, he refuses to insist upon that right.



*In the Nick of Time* is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

[www.centralseminary.edu](http://www.centralseminary.edu) | [info@centralseminary.edu](mailto:info@centralseminary.edu)  
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Paul's example implies a principle that we should not insist upon rights and privileges when those rights and privileges get in the way of effective ministry. We should "become all things to all men" in the sense of exerting no privilege that would block our ministry by offending the people to whom we minister. Instead, we should discipline ourselves so as to accomplish the tasks that Christ has given us to do.

Parenthetically, it needs to be said that Paul is not telling us to surrender duties and obligations. There is a difference between a right and a duty, between a privilege and an obligation. Paul is not saying that we are permitted to lower our ethical standards for the sake of apparent effectiveness in ministry. Eating idol meat as an evangelistic outreach would be wrong. That much becomes clear in the next chapter.

1 Corinthians 10 starts in an odd place. Paul talks about Israel being identified with Moses during the Exodus, and he notes that this identification involved spiritual eating and drinking. This spiritual eating and drinking is then contrasted with the carnal and rebellious eating, drinking, and fornicating in which the Israelites indulged. These rebellious and carnal acts led to drastic judgments from God. Paul draws a clear lesson from this example: Christians, no less than Israelites, must flee idolatry.

Having established this imperative, Paul pivots to a discussion of the Lord's Table. His point is that, just as spiritual eating and drinking identified the Israelites with Moses and God, and just as carnal, rebellious eating and drinking identified them with idolatry, in the same way eating and drinking identify Christians with the blood and body of Christ. Comparably, the Old Testament priests who ate the sacrifices in the tabernacle and temple were identified with (became partakers of) the altar. Clearly, eating and drinking are significant acts that have implications for Christian fellowship and worship. They are not merely the fulfillment of bodily needs. They are also acts that carry meaning.

The heart of Paul's argument is 1 Corinthians 10:20. In chapter 8 he alleged that an idol is nothing in the world. Now he observes that whatever is offered to idols is really offered to demons. While the idol itself is lifeless (per Ps 135:15–18 its eyes do not see, its ears do not hear, it cannot utter words), behind the idol lurks a demon. Paul's particular concern is that believers not be brought into fellowship with demons.

Eating and drinking can establish that kind of fellowship. If eating and drinking gave the Levitical priests fellowship with the altar, and if eating and drinking bring Christians into fellowship with Christ's blood and body, then eating and drinking can also institute fellowship with demons. Demonic fellowship would be a serious matter for God's people, who should be careful about provoking the Lord to jealousy. He is, after all, stronger than we are.

Consequently, Christians should abstain from some things that are not necessarily wrong in themselves. If those things are not helpful and if they do not build up, then they should be avoided. Even if nothing is wrong in itself with eating idol meat, the greater significance of the eating must be taken into account. There may hypothetically be some circumstances under which this meat can be eaten with impunity. In an atmosphere charged with idolatry, however, it must be utterly rejected.

Paul closes his discussion with an exhortation to do all things—specifically, eating and drinking—to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Paul is not here talking about motivations. He is not giving permission to indulge in idol meat or any other activity as long as you want God to be glorified by it. Rather, he is forcing us to evaluate the activities themselves. If an activity is of such a nature that it cannot be done to God's glory, then we should not do it. When eating and drinking identify us with idols, for example, and thus bring us into fellowship with demons, then we should avoid that kind of eating and drinking. Doing all to the glory of God requires us not simply to examine our hearts (which we certainly should do) but more importantly to examine the implications of what we are doing. Often the activities that we are considering have meanings that go beyond the bare acts themselves.



---

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

---