

Back in February, we were in 1 Cor 8, and the whole discussion was around whether it's OK to eat meat that's been sacrificed to an idol or not. And what we learned is, "It's a morally neutral issue" (There is no right or wrong). If I understand that an idol is nothing but a block of wood or a chiselled bit of stone, well it's not a sin, to eat meat that's been sacrificed to it.

But if in eating that meat, we, in some way, are recognising the validity of the idol to which it was sacrificed, well that's a different kettle of fish altogether.

And so the principle we learned in Chapter 8, is "Love limits liberty". Sure: We have the liberty to eat meat that's been sacrificed to an idol,,,,, provided we're not recognising that the idol represents any kind of spiritual power or authority... But if by doing this, it causes someone else to fall into sin, because they **do** recognise it as being real (and they see me doing it, and it makes them think "It's OK to worship other gods") then it's **not** OK for me to eat it...

Love limits liberty...

In Christ, we have certain freedoms, but we don't always exercise these freedoms because of how it might affect the other.

And because here in St George, we don't have a great propensity to idol worship (in the true sense of the word) (of course we have idols such as sport; family; farms; cattle; cars; image – but not idols in the true sense of the word), and

so we focused on how to apply this principle “Love limits liberty” to other “morally neutral” issues, such as:

- Working on a Sunday; or
- Drinking alcohol; or
- How you dress for church; or
- Joining the armed forces.....

In some places of the world, eating meat sacrificed to an idol, is a live issue. Here, not so much...

But at the end of that message, I was asked 2 questions. I didn't answer them – not because I was trying to dodge them, but because I knew when we got to Chapter 10, they'd be answered...

And so here we are today in Chapter 10, once again considering idolatry, and whether it's OK for a Christian to eat meat that's been sacrificed to an idol. And at this point you might be thinking “Oh great, big deal...” But you might be surprised, that today's topic is a little bit more relevant than you think....

OK, so the first question I was asked, was about idols and demons.

Back in Chapter 8, it talked about how an idol is nothing. There **is** only one God. But if that's the case, why is idolatry so evil? How come millions or billions of people get sucked into it??? And why does God hate it so much???

It's because, while an idol is nothing but a physical block of wood or a physical piece of stone, those who sacrifice to it, are entering into the worship of demons.

In our modern society, "tolerance" is seen as the greatest of virtues. And we live in a society where you can believe whatever you want to believe, as long as you don't say that anybody else is wrong. And so the default position of those who are not saved, has become largely either (what I'm going to call) "tolerant atheism", or "tolerant agnosticism" (alright, so the default position, is to not believe in God at all, or to be undecided about religion, but they will tolerate somebody else having their religion, as long as it doesn't affect them, and as long as your religion tolerates other religions.)

And so there's become an increasing move amongst some, (and even amongst some in a few particular churches) towards "multi-faith worship", **or** universalism... I'm sorry for all these big words, but I can't make up shorter ones – that's just the way it is.

And so, particularly in community settings, you will see liberal Christians, joining in worship alongside liberal Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and whatever other religion takes your fancy.... And they do this, under the banner of "inter-faith worship"

And this all springs up, from various theologies of "Universalism". Universalism, is the belief (that some have) that it doesn't matter which god you worship, we're all

worshipping the same god, we just know him by different names.... And in the name of peace, unity and tolerance, people of different religions, enter into worship of their various gods as one...

Does anybody here find this at all, disturbing??? I hope you do, because there is only One True God... The Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit... Any other god (little “g” god), is not a god at all. It’s Satan and his demons, stealing worship away, from the One True God, who does deserve to be worshipped.

- Anyone who worships another god, is worshipping a demon.
- Anyone who worships Allah, and claims that Mohammad is his prophet, is worshipping a demon.
- Anyone who bows down to an idol, is worshipping a demon.
- Anyone who makes up for themselves an image of a god of their own making, is worshipping a demon... This is what I call “modern day idolatry”.

Do you know how to recognise modern-day idolatry? It’s usually prefaced with words something along the lines of “I like to think that God is like”, and then they go on to describe the god that they’ve made up. And it’s certainly not the God who reveals Himself in the Scriptures, and who ultimately made Himself known in The Lord Jesus Christ. And to worship a god of our own making, is idolatry, and as such, demonic.

There's nothing harmless about other religions – it's the worship of demons. And as disciples of Jesus, we give our full allegiance to Christ, and to Christ alone. Paul says,

²¹ 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. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

God reveals Himself as God truly is. We are the body of Christ. We are the fellowship of the body of Christ. We are the fellowship of the blood of Christ. Therefore, we cannot participate in fellowship with demons.

OK.

The second question I was asked, was about Halal. Is Halal food, demonic?

That's a tough question.

Halal food / ingredients / produce, is a relatively new phenomenon in Australia (Oh, it's been around for a while, but it's growing and growing and growing. Why? Because the Islamic market is growing (Islamic Council of Vic: 400 000+ⁱ)...

What is Halal?

Well, the Islamic Council of Victoria, explains it like thisⁱⁱ:

Halal is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted. In reference to food, it is the dietary standard, as prescribed in the Qur'an The opposite of halal is haram, which means unlawful or prohibited.

....

In general every food is considered halal in Islam unless it is specially prohibited by the Qur'an or the Hadith [a Hadith is said to be the sayings of Mohammad, but not recorded in the Quran] .

By official definition, halal foods are those that are:

- 1. Free from any component that Muslims are prohibited from consuming according to Islamic law (Shariah).*
- 2. Processed, made, produced, manufactured and/or stored using utensils, equipment and/or machinery that have been cleansed according to Islamic law.*

....

All foods are considered halal except the following (which are haram):

- Alcoholic drinks and intoxicants*
- Non-Halal Animal Fat*
- Enzymes* (Microbial Enzymes are permissible)*
- Gelatine* – from non-Halal source (fish gelatine is Halal)*
- L-cysteine (if from human hair)*
- Lard*

- *Lipase* (only animal lipase need be avoided)*
- *Non-Halal Animal Shortening*
- *Pork, Bacon / Ham and anything from pigs*
- *Unspecified Meat Broth*
- *Rennet* (All forms should be avoided except for plant / microbial /synthetic – rennet obtained from halal slaughtered animal is permissible).*
- *Stock* (a blend of mix species broth or meat stock)*
- *Tallow* (non-Halal species)*
- *Carnivorous animals, birds of prey and certain other animals*
- *Foods contaminated with any of the above products*

Alright, so when it comes to food, Halal, is that which Muslims believe they are allowed to eat...

In a country that is an Islamic country, and under Sharia Law, it's generally safe to assume that pretty much all foods available, are Halal...

But in Australia, "Halal" has become a marketing tool. And so rather than needing to read through all of the list of ingredients, some products are now branding their food as "Halal", meaning that it doesn't contain any of these forbidden products. (just as some foods brand themselves as being "gluten free", or "nut free", or "Low GI") to let people know if it meets their dietary requirements...

And so some common products that are now Halal certified, include:

- Cadbury chocolate (and bizarrely, even including Easter eggs);

- Sara Lee deserts and pastries;
- Steggles chicken tenders;
- Bega cheese;
- Vegemite;
- Weis Ice cream

And any one of hundreds or thousands of products that we use every day, are Halal certified.

Is there harm in eating food that is Halal certified? Well no, it's the same as other food... The only harm, is that companies who gain this certification, do it for marketing purposes – to increase their market share to those of Islamic faith. Well fair enough. Which of you farmers don't want to sell your produce to people of other religions...

But the point of concern, is companies have to pay the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (or some other Islamic accrediting body), to gain their certification. And whatever they earn from this, of course can be put towards the promotion of Islam...

And so, every time a company becomes "Halal Certified", they actually are financially supporting, the promotion of Islam.

Now, that's for general foodstuffs. But when it comes to halal certified meat, that's a different story.

More and more of our meat works are being accredited as Halal, which means the animals when they are slaughtered, have to be killed by a Muslim; the animal has to be facing towards Mecca; and an Islamic prayer is recited over the

animal. In English it says something like “In the name of Allah – Allah is the greatest” And in my bad pronunciation of Arabic “Bismallahi Allahu Akbar.”

And so the animal is killed in the name of Allah...

Can a Christian eat **that** meat? Well, the answer is “Yes” and “No”.

After many years, we have come a full circle, and we are now part of a intentionally constructed multi-cultural and multi-faith society.

A Muslim is not allowed to eat an animal, if it has been killed in any other name than the name of Allah... And so we Christians now have to grapple with the question, “Can we eat an animal if it **has** been killed in the name of Allah?”

And all of a sudden, 1 Corinthians 10 becomes very relevant, for us in our culture today. What does it say?

Well firstly, we have to understand, that the Islamic slaughtermen, employed in the meatworks that your cattle are probably going to, enter into the worship of demons, every time that they do this in the name of Allah. But the meat itself, is not demonic. It only becomes spiritually tainted to us, if we recognise it as representing worship to Allah.

And so Paul gives some very practical advice:

1 Corinthians 10:25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. ²⁶ For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." ²⁷ If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience.

Alright, so God does not call us to become "the halal police". God has given us **all** food to eat, and to us, it's clean. If you're shopping for meat from the butcher or the supermarket, just buy it and eat it – no worries – the more meat the better. We're not called to be people who go on a quest, or an inquisition to find out: "Now tell me, Mr Butcher, prove to me, that this is not Halal meat....."

And when you go out to dinner, and someone sets a meal before you, it's not necessary to seek an assurance that it's not halal. Just eat it. In fact Paul tells us, not to give offenceⁱⁱⁱ.

And so we **can** eat meat that is Halal. But there's **also** a time when we shouldn't.

Verse 28:

²⁸ But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience — ²⁹ I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience?

Right, in the supermarket, sometimes meat will be distinctly marketed as being Halal. Sometimes they'll have a special halal compartment in the meat section (Well, you wouldn't go and shop from there). Sometimes, the meat will be packaged, with a prominent Halal accreditation symbol on its packaging. What does that symbol tell us??? This animal's been killed in the name of Allah.

Would you still eat it???? Hmm... Well yes, we are free to eat an animal if it died in the name of Allah, but not if they're making 'a thing' of it. If I buy the distinctly Halal meat from the supermarket, and Jo-blo sees me doing it, what does that tell Jo-blo? These Christians don't have a problem with Allah...

And so, for the sake of the conscience of the other, we are **not** free to eat meat, if it's being promoted as Halal.

What's the principal at play here? Back in chapter 8, we learned about how love limits liberty. Today we learn the principal of doing all for the glory of God.

V31

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my

own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

Here, we catch a glimpse of Paul's true heart, and it's the heart of the Gospel... Everything we do, we do to the glory of God. How does God get glorified? Well, I'll tell you how he **doesn't** get glorified – by going around unnecessarily offending everybody, by telling everybody what we're against. The world will **not** be evangelised, and God's kingdom will **not** grow, by waging some kind of modern-day crusade against people of other religions.

Our witness to the community, is simply to abstain. We abstain from participating in their worship of idols and demons. In the case of halal meat, our witness is to abstain from eating that product, when it's promoted as an animal that was killed in the name of Allah.

That's our witness – personal abstinence in the face of general acceptance... Our aim??? To glorify God, in the hope that many will be saved by our simple witness.

Some people get it all wrong. In the name of God, they become a people who are known as being against everything. You can't do this. You can't do that. You can't eat this. You can't drink that.

That's not how God calls us to live. By the blood of Jesus, we have freedom and liberty. And out of love for others, we share the good news of Jesus. If we become a people of offence – if we become a stench in the nostrils of ordinary old Jo-blo in the community, they're not going to hear the gospel

– All they’re going to hear, is legality, and not the Gospel of Grace.

And so, by the way we conduct ourselves, we give God glory.

Now, I know we’ve gone on long enough, but I just want to give you one more example...

Another way I apply this principal, is when it comes to biodynamic produce. “Bio-dynamic farming practices” are generally promoted as being similar to organic. They are not. “Bio-dynamic” farming is very much tied up in the spiritual realm – I would actually call it “witchcraft”....

One time when I was looking for a non-alcoholic wine (for communion), I discovered that many of the non-alcoholic, still wines, promoted themselves as being “bio-dynamic”.

Is it a sin to eat or drink biodynamic produce? I don’t believe so. But when it’s being marketed as biodynamic, and biodynamic principals are rooted in paganism / Eastern mysticism / the spiritual realm, - if it’s marketed as “biodynamic”, I don’t want it.

And it really came home for me, when I was considering communion wine:

You cannot share the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

Who'd have thought we'd have so much to think about, when it comes to meat offered to idols???

Questions???

- ⁱ <https://www.icv.org.au/about/about-islam-overview/what-is-halal-a-guide-for-non-muslims/>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.icv.org.au/about/about-islam-overview/what-is-halal-a-guide-for-non-muslims/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 10:22