

Publishing Editor's column

IN PAUL'S first letter to the Corinthian ecclesia the question of whether or not believers should partake of meat which had been first offered to idols takes up three chapters. The matter was clearly an important one, but in dealing with it Paul does not give either a definite 'yes' or 'no' to the practice, but instead brings out a number of very important lessons. The most serious aspect of the subject was that of actually attending feasts in the temple of an idol. Paul points out in chapter 10 the dangers of doing this, referring to the way Israel fell away repeatedly in the wilderness, and warning the complacent Corinthian brethren, who thought they would be untouched by such worldly associations, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (v. 12). He also refers to the inappropriateness of believers fellowshipping with the Lord Jesus Christ in the emblems and then fellowshipping idol worshippers in temple feasts (v. 21).

The problem was not restricted to Corinth, however. It was also a problem at Rome (Rom. 14) and, in Asia Minor, Thyatira (Rev. 2:14,20). Why was it such a problem? It would have been difficult for those entering the ecclesia from the world to sever worldly connections, as it is today; but there was more to it than that. In order to practise various trades and professions, or at least to do well in them, it was necessary in those days to belong to trade guilds, and this meant attending feasts in the temples of idolatry. This was more than a matter of eating a meal; there would have been drunkenness, foul talk and lewd jesting, and even sexual misconduct of the worst kind. In such an environment no believer would have remained uncontaminated, and weaker brethren would have gone badly astray.

Today the greatest contact which most believers have with the world is in their work, and work makes increasing demands on the time and energy of people. But worse than this is the way work increasingly takes over people's lives, making demands on time that otherwise would have been their own, requiring association with colleagues outside normal working hours in courses, seminars, conferences and social events designed to promote togetherness and instill a 'corporate culture'. Attendance at such events may not be absolute requirements, but they are the way to 'get on'; yet they involve associations outside the work place with those whose behaviour is much like the frequenters of idol temples in the first century. For believers, in such a working environment, the questions posed by the Apostle Paul are surely very relevant. Can I continue in such an environment without being contaminated, or led into wrong ways, or even being taken away from the Truth? Are such associations compatible with the fellowship we have with Jesus Christ? The problems faced by our first-century brethren and sisters are very relevant to today, and we very much need the advice of the Scriptures in dealing with these things. Though there is no longer an association today between employment and idol worship in Western society, there is the all-pervading worship of Mammon to contend with. What is the point of having a flourishing career if it leads to our losing the only thing which is in the end worth having, eternal life in God's Kingdom?

Tony Benson

Publication of articles in The Testimony does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine, as defined in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith.