

Paul's Non-Assumption

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons." (1 Corinthians 10:17-20, ESV)

The fifth amendment to the U.S. Constitution says that no person "shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself." Why am I bringing this up when the topic is Paul's words? Because, we are familiar with a citizen pleading the fifth or taking the fifth, meaning a person refuses to answer questions in court on the grounds the answer might incriminate herself. We are not allowed to infer any guilt from the silence of that person: Hence, refusing to speak is not a crime. If you were put on trial in a U.S. court, your silence would be respected. Why? Because the words you speak are what stand in court, not the words you do not speak. If you are a citizen on trial in the U.S., the court should be careful what conclusions it infers from your words.

We certainly have liberty, as Christ's disciples. (cf. Jam. 1:25) We are instructed to look into the perfect law of liberty and to persevere. (Jam. 2:12) But, consider that when the apostles speak words for us to hear and obey, we are indeed at liberty: to hear and obey, or to sin. When John tells Christians to lay down their lives for their brethren and share the world's goods with one another (cf. 1 Jno. 3:16-17) I am not at liberty to rightfully teach that Christians should abandon their brethren in times of need or say to a sister, "You're on your own with this trouble of yours." I have the liberty to say this, but in my liberty I would be committing sin.

In 1 Cor. 10:17-20, Paul takes pains to point out that one inference is not as good as another. The Corinthians, who even had the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19), may have tried to guess what Paul's first statement implied, but they would have been mistaken: Those inferences, that food offered to idols is something, or that an idol is something, would have not have been necessary. Paul is clear: The Pagans offer sacrifices to demons, not Yahweh God. I cannot infer from silence, only from what Paul says. He is not silent on meat sacrificed to idols. I should be careful what I infer from Paul's words. I would not want my silence or my words erroneously twisted against me, in court or otherwise, so why would I treat the words of scripture unlike how I would want my words to be treated?