

I *Corinthians* x. 29 *b* and 30.<sup>1</sup>

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*“For why is my liberty judged by another conscience? If I with thankfulness partake, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?”*

The commentators have been rather inexplicably at fault in the interpretation of these verses. They bear on their face their character as a justification of liberty, and were not our senses dulled by custom, we should scarcely believe it credible that any one could read them as a justification of either verse 28 or 29 *a*, both of which are limitations of freedom. It has been apparently only a mechanical feeling that verse 27 is too far off, — as if, in a flowing discourse, distance was to be measured by the inch, — that has prevented expositors from seeing that the natural reference of the γάρ with which our verses open is to that verse. Three considerations may be adduced which will go far towards vindicating this connection.

1. This γάρ most naturally finds its reference not in the most subordinate, but in the chief thought of the context. A glance, however, at the whole previous argument from viii. 1 will show us that the permission contained in verse 27 is the main thought here, while the limitation of verses 28 and 29 *a* while morally the most important thought and for the purposes of the whole argument the prime consideration, is here, in this narrow context, very secondary and subordinate, rising scarcely indeed above the nature of a parenthesis. The issue of the total discussion concerning meats offered to idols had been a two-fold argument against the practice as on the one hand injurious to the weaker brethren and on the other dangerous to themselves. In his closing paragraph (x. 23–xi. 1) St. Paul first of all recapitulates the gist of his argument (verses 23 and 24) and then points out two cases to which the arguments are not intended to apply (verses 25 and 27). In other words, after dissuading his readers from eating meats offered to idols, he ends by adducing two cases in which permission should be granted to eat them. These two permissions are consequently here the main matter. The first is expressed broadly without limitation (verse 25); to the second (verse 27) the Apostle adjoins the limitation given in verses 28 and 29 *a*. Had this limitation been expressed in three words, no one would

<sup>1</sup> Read in December, 1884.

have thought for a moment of attaching the succeeding part of the discussion to it. The most careless reader would have passed over it and read the  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  as justifying the main idea, — that contained in verse 27. Its entirely subordinate character is not changed, however, by its length, and as soon as we recognize it, we naturally read verse 29 *b*, in connection with verse 27.

2. The parallelism of structure which emerges between verses 25 and 26 on the one side and 27 and 29 *b* on the other when these latter two are taken together is an argument for this construction. To the permission given in verse 25 the Apostle attaches in verse 26 a justification. We feel the fitness of this. After the strength of the argument in the sections from viii. 1 to x. 22, deterring from eating of the idol-sacrifice, any permission to do so needed a justifying word. After verse 27 we look for a similar justification. So strong is the sentiment demanding it that one has crept in at the end of verse 28 in most MSS. It is found in the actual text, however, at verse 29 *b*. And it is worth noting that the statements, which are all the more forcibly uttered in verses 29 *b* and 30 because put in the form of questions, are of like character in their relation to verse 27 with the broad statement in verse 26 in its relation to verse 25.

3. The logical result of this connection of the clauses is its best defence. No one can have felt quite satisfied with the straining put on the words of verses 29 *b* and 30 when they were made a justification either of the fact that not their own but another's conscience was in consideration, or of the necessity of charity. As a matter of fact the verses simply support the other side of both matters. But if we assign the  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  to verse 27, all goes smoothly and the logic is complete. One's liberty is not to be subjected to another's conscience, save in the one case already excepted (verses 28 and 29 *a*). And this view equally presumes the simple sense of all the connectives. This is true also of the  $\omicron\upsilon\delta\epsilon$  of verse 31, which is to be made to gather up all the previous context since verse 23, and to found on this total an inference. And since verses 23 and 24 are recapitulatory of the whole argument from viii. 1, verses 31–xi. 1 become logically the conclusion derived from the whole, raising the motive to action to a higher stage than even charity (verse 31), yet to one which is inclusive of the law of love (verses 32 *sq.*).