

1 Corinthians 08 - Food Offered to Idols; Liberty in Christ vs the Priority of Love

III. Questions asked of Paul (1 Cor 7:1–16:24)

- (2) Food sacrificed to the idols (1 Cor 8:1–11:1)
 - (A) Priority of love over knowledge (8:1-13)
 - (a) Knowledge versus love (8:1-3)
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(2) Food sacrificed to the idols (1 Cor 8:1–11:1)

In the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, pagan Gentiles offered sacrificial animals daily to various pagan gods and goddesses in their temples. Only a token portion went to the deity and burned up on the altar. The temple priests, attendants, and their families ate most of the meat, but frequently they could not eat all that the worshippers brought. Consequently they sold what remained to the meat market operators in the marketplace, who then sold it to the general public.

There in the open marketplace the general public purchased the portion of the meat left over from the idol sacrifice. This meat was very desirable and popular because the pagans usually offered only the best animals in sacrifice. However, the butchers did not usually identify it as meat that someone had offered to an idol. This is the meat in view in the discussion.

1 Corinthians 8

(A) Priority of love over knowledge (8:1-13)

In this section Paul's main concern is believers behaving arrogantly by acting on knowledge, regardless of the negative effect it was having on other believers whose conscience did not yet permit them to act on the knowledge. This demonstrated a lack of proper knowledge because proper knowledge will use that knowledge to love one another and build them up rather than tear them down. True knowledge takes account of one's brethren and gives love the priority over one's personal freedom.

(a) Knowledge versus love (8:1-3)

1 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge.

Knowledge makes one conceited, but love edifies people.

1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

1 Now concerning food offered to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

– "Now concerning" – *peri de*, Paul changes the topic and turns to the next question in the letter he had received from the Corinthians (Cf. 7:1,25; 12:1; 16:1): Christian liberty in relation to food eaten in a Jewish-Gentile setting (Cf. 10:14-33).

– "...we all have knowledge" – scholars agree that the last part of the sentence is a quote from the letter the Corinthians had sent to Paul

— Eating meat that may have been sacrificed to idols was offending weaker believers, so the stronger believers should not eat this meat, even though there was nothing wrong with doing so

— The Corinthians exalted knowledge to an unhealthy level; they were arrogant, which knowledge can lead to. Arrogance was one of the Corinthians' major weaknesses (4:6,18-19; 5:2).

– "...Knowledge makes one conceited, but love edifies people" – knowledge leads to arrogance; love is never arrogant (Cf. 13:4). Paul makes this same point elsewhere in this epistle (Cf. 1:5; 12:8).

— The purpose of knowledge is not to separate yourself above other believers, but to help other believers. If a person knows this properly, they know that love is what edifies.

— However, some Gentile believers at Corinth were boasting in the knowledge that since there was only one God and no such thing as an idol, therefore they could eat meat sacrificed to idols. It was desirable to eat at these temples because it was like eating at the best restaurant in town.

— But the rest (weaker believers) viewed it as a cultic meal that was inseparable from worshipping the idol. Those who had no issue eating the meat were not loving them as they should. Thus, Paul explores the relationship between knowledge, liberty, and love, giving love the priority in these types of situations.

— Paul was not condemning knowledge, but rather teaching that it is knowledge coupled with love that achieves the goal of edification. If a believer understands this, he will forego his liberty in order to protect and build up his fellow believer.

2 If anyone **thinks** that he knows anything, **he has not yet known** as he ought **to know**;

2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;

2 If anyone thinks he really knows something, he has not yet learned it as he ought to know it.

2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

- "...thinks" - *dokeō*, to suppose

— If someone thinks/supposes they have full command of a subject matter, you can be sure they do not. There is always more to learn about any subject. No one can ever learn or know it all. There is always another question they have not asked. There is always another aspect they have not considered. Thus, someone who purports to know-it-all is unrealistic and arrogant.

- "...he has not yet known" - the Corinthian believers knew that there was only one God, but some concluded that this meant they could eat in pagan temples.

— However, they did not know as they *should have* known because they did not take into consideration how their exercise of knowledge could injure others

3 but if **anyone loves God**, he is **known by Him**.

3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

3 But anyone who loves God is known by him.

3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

- "...anyone loves God" - a person loves God by keeping His commandments (Cf. John 14:15,23)

- "...known by Him" - God is omniscient and thus knows everything, so being "known by Him" is when God takes special note of that person

— "known" - *ginōskō*, to know intimately, to know by experience (Cf. Gen 4:1); it often denotes the most intimate form of knowing someone

— Thus, God "takes note" of those who keep His commandments and makes Himself further known to that person (John 14:21)

— So it is more important to be known by God than to know things about God because being known by God is the avenue to knowing more about Him.

— The key to all of this is keeping His commandments (Cf. 7:19)

(b) Content of the knowledge (8:4-6)

4 Therefore, concerning the eating of food sacrificed to idols, **we know that an idol is nothing** at all in the world, and that there is no God but one.

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

4 Now concerning eating food offered to idols: We know that no idol is real in this world and that there is only one God.

4 As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but

one.

- "Therefore" - signals a logical conclusion from the opening statement (v1-3)
- "...concerning" - when applying the relationship between knowledge and love to the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols
- "...we know that" - affirms that Paul and the Corinthians knew that the idols were nothing, and that there was only one true God
- "...an idol is nothing" - just because all believers know that an idol is non-existent, does not mean that all believers are convinced that it is proper to eat meat that was sacrificed to an idol during an act of worship. Technically, there was nothing wrong with the meat itself, but the association to idol worship may violate someone's conscience.

All foods are clean, says...

- Jesus (Mark 7:14-23)
- Peter (Acts 10:9-15)
- Paul (Rom 14:1-12; 1 Cor 8:4,8; 10:23-33; Col 2:16-17; 1 Tim 4:4)

5 **For** even if there are **so-called gods** whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,

5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,

5 For even if there are "gods" in heaven and on earth (as indeed there are many so-called "gods" and "lords"),

5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)

- "For" - indicates a further explanation coming...

- "...so-called gods" - in fact in some people's minds there are other gods, which is true, and in reality there are demons behind these gods (Cf. 10:20)...

6 yet for us there is *only* one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, **by whom are all things**, and we *exist* through Him.

6 yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.

6 yet for us there is only one God, the Father, from whom everything came into being and for whom we live. And there is only one Lord, Jesus the Messiah, through whom everything came into being and through whom we live.

6 But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

- ...But as believers we have come to know that there is but One God (v6), who is the source of "all things" and therefore our purpose is "for Him" and not ourselves or idols
- "...by whom are all things" - Jesus Christ is the agent of all things, and therefore our very existence is due to Him (Cf. John 1:3)
- Note how the Father and Son are set alongside one another as co-equals in divinity within distinct roles as source and agent (Cf. John 1:1; Col 2:9)

(c) Consideration for the weaker brother (8:7-13)

At issue is the nature of the community. Is it a community where those with a correct theology can ignore others who have an aversion to eating the idol-consecrated food? What must prevail is not the principle of superior knowledge but the realization that those who lack knowledge are those 'for whom Christ died' (8:11). Edification takes precedence over freedom; the other person's advantage takes precedence over one's own (10:23-24).

7 However, not all people have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and **their conscience, being weak, is defiled**.

7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

7 But not everyone has this knowledge. Some people are so accustomed to idolatry that when they eat food that has been offered to an idol, their conscience becomes contaminated because it is weak.

7 Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

- "However" - *alla*, a strong contrastive. Every Christian should know there are no other gods but the one true God, but some of the Corinthians, because of their previous belief in idols, had difficulty shaking that belief.

- "...their conscience, being weak, is defiled" - some of these former idol worshippers had guilt about eating meat that someone had previously dedicated to a pagan deity

— Their guilt came from thinking they were doing something wrong, even though they were not. This false guilt created a problem for them in their relationship with God.

— Paul said the person's conscience was "weak" because even though he or she *intellectually* believed there was only one God, his or her *emotions* had not fully assimilated that truth

— Our conscience is a judge that commends or condemns based on a received standard. The standard by which it judges can be right or wrong. In this case, some of their

consciences were still judging according to the standard that was wrong. This type of conscience is referred to as weak.

— If they ate the food contrary to their conscience it would defile their conscience. The conscience can only be strengthened by study and being convinced in one's own mind. Along the way, it is important to always follow one's conscience until it tells us otherwise. Once we are convinced of a different standard, the conscience judges according to the new standard.

8 Now food will not bring us close to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

8 However, food will not bring us closer to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat food that has been offered to an idol, and no better off if we do.

8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

- Food itself has no religious significance (Rom 14:17); it was a non-issue. We can eat or not eat; one is not better or worse than the other.

— Paul agrees with their view of religious liberty, but takes issue with them for their lack of love and compassion for their weaker brothers and sisters (v9)

It is the clean heart, and not clean food, that will matter; and the weak brother confounds the two.

9 But take care that this **freedom** of yours does not somehow become a **stumblingblock** to the weak.

9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

9 But you must see to it that this right of yours does not become a stumbling block for those who are weak.

9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

- "But" - in these cases, food was not the only issue; if it was, Paul would tell them to go ahead and eat in the pagan temples. The understanding that some food is all right to eat should not be the only factor to determine whether or not we eat it.

— The real issue was some exercising their liberty to eat where it became a "stumbling block" to those who had a weak conscience. Love for others who may be bothered by our

participation in something is also important. The weak brother is weak because his emotions have not caught up to his intellect.

- "...freedom" - *exousia*, liberty; denotes a right, authority, or a privilege. In certain contexts, such as this one, it is the freedom to exercise one's right.
- "...stumbling block" - any barrier to another person's personal relationship with God; a trap that ensnares. Believers should not set traps for other believers (Cf. Gal 6:1).
- The Corinthians, who had returned to the pagan temples for their feasts, were disregarding how their participation was affecting their brethren, who still viewed participation as worship, or at least approval, of the idol

10 For if someone sees you, the one who has knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will his conscience, if he is weak, not be **strengthened** to eat things sacrificed to idols?

10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

10 For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you, who know better, eating in an idol's temple, he will be encouraged to eat what has been offered to idols, won't he?

10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;

- This verse seems to state that Paul's major beef was Corinthian participation in feasts in idol temples, moreso than strictly eating marketplace meat that had possibly been sacrificed to idols

- Paul now appeals on behalf of the rights of the weak...suppose a Christian in Corinth thought that eating meat offered to idols was insignificant, and thus went to a pagan temple to partake in a meal

- Some in Corinth were attending these meals, and encouraging others to take this "knowledgeable" stand

- "...strengthened" - *oikodomeō*, often translated as "edified" (14:4)

- Here, Paul tells more mature believers to not flaunt their freedom in Christ before a weaker brother because that would be "strengthening" him to something that violates their conscience. So *oikodomeō* is not always a positive thing.

11 For through your knowledge the one who is weak is **ruined**, the brother or sister **for whose sake Christ died.**

11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

11 In that case, the weak brother for whom the Messiah died is ruined by your knowledge.

11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

- Paul explains what took place in such a situation (v10): the weaker brother is torn down rather than built up, because of your "liberty"
- The "knowledgeable" Christian, by his "knowledge" of what he considered legitimate, by acting on the basis of that knowledge alone, destroyed (ruined) his brother's relationship with God
- "...ruined" - destroyed; the verb is in present tense: action already occurring; being destroyed (Cf. Rom 14:15)
- Paul raised the possibility that the weaker brother, seeing the stronger brother eating in the pagan temple, may return to idolatry
- The example stresses the value of the weaker brother by referring to the fact that Christ died for him. Therefore, the stronger brother dare not view him and his scruples as insignificant or unimportant.
- There is a contrast between the death of Christ and the callousness of the "strong" Christians. There are few decisions that you make that do not involve someone else.
- Is there such a thing as a "victimless crimes?" Only if you disregard those in whose love you live.
- "...for whose sake Christ died" - the theological issue involved in sacrificing one's freedoms/rights for the sake of others, which is exactly what Christ did for all of us on the cross!

12 And so, by **sinning** against the brothers *and sisters* and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

12 When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak consciences, you are sinning against the Messiah.

12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

- "...sinning" - present tense verb: the action is in progress; by "ruining" your brother (v11), you are committing sin. To sin against the brethren is to sin against Christ.

— By sinning against Christ's body (believers), we are sinning against Him. Remember what Jesus said to Saul on the Damascus Road: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4ff; 22:8; 26:15)

- The ultimate wrong of the person who lives only by his "knowledge" is not just that he lacks true knowledge, or that he causes another brother to stumble, but that he sins against Jesus Christ.

— Jesus and his brethren are one. Jesus loves His church. We injure Him when we injure it...you never know when people are watching.

13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to sin.

13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

13 Therefore, if food that I eat causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, in order to keep my brother from stumbling.

13 Wherefore, if [sacrificial] meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

- "Therefore" - a preliminary conclusion of the relationship between knowledge, liberty, and love as it relates to dining in an idol's temple

- "...if" - first class condition, assumed to be true, at least for the sake of argument

- "...food" - a general term which is at the center of the discussion (v1,4,7,10)

- "...causes my brother to sin" [2x] - *skandalizo*, to set off a trap; "cause to fall"

— Paul viewed eating in an idol temple a kind of trigger that would set off a trap, that could ensnare a fellow believer. This ensnarement could slow his progress in his walk and cause him pain.

- "...I will never eat meat again" - Paul says it's not worth it to sin against the body and Christ (Cf. Rom 14:13-23)

— In 9:22, Paul is willing to forego the eating certain foods so that he might advance the cause of Christ and the growth of the church (Matt 22:37-39).

— Love is humble and sets aside self-interest for the best-interest of others

— For Paul, our love for other brothers, rather than our "rights," should be the governor over our knowledge of what is permissible

- Paul is not saying that we should always try to please everyone by what we do. He meant that we should be careful that what we are doing does not hinder someone else from coming to know Christ, or keep him from growing in Christ.

The issue in this chapter is not that of offending someone in the church. Paul dealt with that subject in 10:31—11:1 and Rom 14. It is, rather, doing something that someone else might repeat to his or her own hurt ("causing my brother to stumble"). Paul dealt with an attitude in the Corinthians. They were arguing for a behavior on the basis of knowledge, but Paul said the proper basis was love.

Love is the solution, not knowledge, in all social problems.

Our culture, wherever we may live, promotes our personal rights very strongly. This emphasis has permeated the thinking of most Christians. We need to remember that there is something more important than our freedom to do as we please. That something is the spiritual development of other people. As those to whom other Christians look as

examples, it is especially important for you and me to recall this principle as we live. Our willingness to accept this standard for ourselves will reveal our true love for God and people. Our failure to do so will reveal not only our lack of knowledge, but also our lack of love.