

1 Corinthians 8

Intro:

--**Now concerning things offered to idols.** . . . Paul is now moving on to the next question that the Corinthian's had asked. Positively, this question at least showed that there were some there with tender consciences who truly wanted to please God. It also lets us know there was differing opinions on the subject.

--This discussion is really going to run all the way to chapter 11. This may not seem very applicable to us, but it had so many angles in the early church: Paul dealt with it in Antioch and **Acts 15** particularly in relation to the Jewish dietary law and eating things with the blood; Paul dealt with it in **Romans 14** in relation to vegetarians and feast days; Paul deals with it here in relation to idol worship.

--It seems like the main issue that the Corinthians were arguing about was not only eating the meat but going to and participating in these idolatrous feasts. (The sacrificed animal meat typically having some offered to the god, some given to the priests, and the rest sold at a market or served as a pseudo-restaurant in the old world.) The new believers were still going to and buying from these scenarios.

--Paul had already commanded them not to fellowship with idolaters (**5:10-11**) and he will clearly forbid them to participate in these demonic feasts (**10:20**) but still make allowance for them to eat purchased meat in their own homes (**10:25**).

--So while we may not have these exact questions (though many in other countries still do!) Paul's underlying principles in addressing these questions are universal and immediately applicable to us.

--Now that we know where Paul is going, it is important to see where he starts. He *starts* by addressing their forgetfulness of Christian love!

--Paul knows that one of the loveliest and most powerful things after salvation is the fellowship of the body of Christ. He is also well aware of the first and greatest command and Christ's new commandment.

Verses 1-3:

--Paul wants to show that these Corinthians have erred in their response to this issue because they have erred in their judgment of what is most important. The aim of our faith is not knowledge but love. All the knowledge that we acquire should only be added fuel to love. Therefore love is to be our guiding light and not merely knowledge.

--To prove this Paul sets up two contrasts:

- 1) Knowledge puffs up but love builds up.
- 2) The prideful learner is actually unknown to himself. The one who loves is fully known of God.

--(1) Paul admits that we all have knowledge. In Christ, we have come into contact with the truth about God, the supernatural world, ourselves, and the natural world. Yet the issue was that the Corinthians were determining their behavior on information alone.

--Paul (an intellectual himself) gives us the clear contrast. **Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.**

--**Puffs up** has the idea of being inflated with bellows. **Edifies** has the idea of building up.

--This contrast is often perceived as anti-intellectual because in some senses it is! The Holy Spirit warns us that there is a direct danger for knowledge seekers—pride and lack of love.

--Intellect is not alone in this. The Bible also has clear warnings for the beautiful woman—**charm is deceitful and beauty is passing but the woman who fears the Lord she shall be praised.** Or the person with a lot of money (wealth comes with temptations and makes it hard to get into heaven) or strength (don't use it all for yourself or trust in it).

--Paul knows this danger is true because he was that person! It wasn't an idea or intellectual argument that led him to Christ. It was an experience of Christ Himself.

*Lewis (The Weight of Glory): "The intellectual life is not the only road to God, nor the safest, but we find it to be a road, and it may be the appointed road for us. Of course, it will be so only so long as we keep the impulse pure and disinterested. That is the great difficulty. As the author of the *Theologia Germanica* says, we may come to love knowledge—our knowledge—more than the thing known: to delight not in the exercise of our talents but in the fact that they are ours, or even in the reputation they bring us. Every success in the scholar's life increases this danger. If it becomes irresistible, he must give up his scholarly work. The time for plucking out the right eye has arrived."*

--Knowledge puffs up and one begins desiring to *know* well instead of *live* well. They live a *think* life instead of *actual* life. We can love truth without loving love. We can love knowledge because of what it brings us in terms of: position, reputation, prestige, and wealth. It is possible to acquire more truth than you know what to do with! Reason even begins to overtake Revelation. Man's mind exalted over the God who made it.

--All this is simply the fruit of being puffed up.

--Now, this doesn't have to happen. True Biblical love has knowledge. And knowledge can be used to build up those around us and the body of Christ. *We know a few great seminarians who are eager to offer their knowledge as a help to those without it or on the learning path.*

1 John 4:7-8: Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

--Love is the true measure of our knowledge. If we think we are growing in knowledge but our love for those around us is lessening—we are deceiving ourselves. **Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.**

--(2-3) The contrast here is a bit harder to see. It is between thinking you know yourself and actually being known of God.

--Paul gives a warning to the person who thinks they know everything—or at least everything about something. These are the people—as we say—who are: “in the know.” In contrast to be people who are not “in the know.” *Here is the caste system of intellect—they Vs. us*

--So the person with knowledge begins to look at themselves as part of a higher caste than those around them or those not on their level. If you don't have the degrees you cannot even speak to them. They love ideas more than actual people and thereby create an elitest echo-chamber filled with their friends who see and agree. *This can be in: Politics, Education, Doctors, and the theological edge of the Church.*

--This person walks in their knowledge but is actually living in ignorance.

--Paul contrasts that with the person who walks in love to God and man. That person, though not even seeing themselves clearly, is known by God. Known through and through as to motive and purpose. It is a sign of God's grace and approval to be known of Him.

****Exodus 33:12+17: Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people.’ But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight’. . . So the LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.”****

--So, these Corinthians who thought they knew so much were having issues because they were allowing *knowledge* and not *love* to be the main factor in their relationships with God and with one another. Even so, anyone who truly loves God will also love those around them as they walk with God.

--To be clear: knowledge is not irrelevant (nor doctrinal positions) but it cannot serve as the primary basis of our Christian behavior or fellowship—particularly in matters of conscience as we find here in this scenario.

--We are to hold all our beliefs in Christian love: What if my brother or sister in Christ is wrong about: cessationism, calvinism, infant baptism, pre-trib/pre-mil, rapture, women pastor's, etc. How should that actually make me feel or to treat them? With compassion and love!

Verses 4-6:

--Here Paul is going to address the issue head on. He has covered the problems with their approach and now he is going to instruct them on how to see the issues clearly.

--(4) First, Paul states that any man-made idol or god is actually nothing. Every single one of them have absolutely no reality behind them. They are non-entities. Literally, they are figments of human imagination.

--(5) Here Paul gives a concession that he will touch on later in chapter ten. He says that if there is anything at all behind these so-called gods or lords it is no true divinity but a created being. There is only One True God and Creator.

--Any reality we find behind a false idol is in fact demonic. *Watchman Nee story (Sit, Walk, Stand): Island off southern China; 16 year old kicked out of school and just saved; an *effective* god; festival day w/divination for 286 years of no rain; will rain!; prayer + praise; rain on day; idol carried and falls; new day—new rain*

--(6) Paul makes it clear that our God is both the first cause, the present Sustainer, and the final End of all things. He created Satan and his fallen angels.

--In a world where people still feared supernatural powers—and had experienced them—this was very important!

Colossians 1:13: He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

--We also see Jesus Christ as the One through whom the Father created all things (Jn. 1:3; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) and also given the divine title of *Lord*.

--It is in Him that we find all our purpose and meaning for life: *we for Him. . . through whom we live*. And what beauty we are given in Paul's language: *Father—Creator + Lord— Savior*. So different than the fickle and fear-mongering gods like Zeus or Diana!

Verses 7-8:

--Here Paul points out their problem. They have knowledge but ignored the fact that not everyone possessed that knowledge in godly faith. Food as a material creation was neutral—and still is. How that food is used in relation to God and others is what matters.

--The knowledge we have must be held in faith and not all of those present in Corinth were strong enough to do so—think of what some of them must have given to these false gods.

--If we act in a way that is wrong, or we think could be wrong, it is in fact sinful for us.

Romans 14:23: But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Verses 9-13:

--So here now is the issue. Paul admits their knowledge of idols and food was mature but their attitude toward their weaker brethren was not.

--Paul admits that they had *liberty* but warns that their liberty can become: *a stumbling-block*, could cause the *weak brother* to *perish*, could be a *sin against the brethren*, a *wound*, and a *sin against Christ!*

--Our *rights* cannot be exercised in love without regard to those around us. The Christian *never* lives or acts alone. All of my life matters to God and to those He has placed me with.

--Notice Paul uses *brother + brethren* four times in 11-12 to emphasize this family aspect of the love which should guide our knowledge and *liberty*.

--Paul gives a serious warning here. The issue is not eating meat or not eating meat. The issue is the loveless harming and destruction of another's faith. One for *whom Christ died!*

--Does our knowledge and liberty harm or destroy others? Have our loveless actions wounded a brother or sister in Christ? Maybe not meat sacrificed to idols but think of all those who have been led into sin through questionable things like: Social media; Sports bar or Social drinking scenes; Gym life or Body worship; Theology talk; Entertainment defilement; etc. This is not legalistic this is realistic!

--My life has an effect. Don't we all realize this with our kids? Don't watch our own music, shows, and discussions around them? What about our less spiritually mature brothers and sisters in Christ? It is a serious thing to wound a person's conscience toward God! Are we using our liberties in a way that causes other believers to wound, sear, and make hard and calloused their conscience toward God?

--We can act like it is some big "cost" for us to change but Paul makes it clear that Christ died for them. He died for them and we cannot even abstain from a meal or movie for them?

--Paul closes with a stern warning: ***But when you sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.***

--(13) I think that Paul can say this because he would never forget that voice that spoke to him: ***Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?***