



1 Corinthians 8:1-13

NKJ 1 Corinthians 8:1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.

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

6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

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

9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?

11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

As a pastor, I have had to consider more than ever the example I set to other Christians, particularly new Christians or Christians who may not have grown much in the faith. I have to ask the question, might I, even unintentionally, by my example lead them to do something they suspect is a sin and should I therefore refrain from it even though strictly speaking it is not a sin for me to do it? This is particularly applicable to fields like Music, Entertainment, Eating, and Drinking.

Let me give you just a small example of how this principle can work out, let us say that to illustrate a point in a sermon I make a reference to the movie *Schindler's List*. Someone who believes that watching R-rated movies is sinful hears this, and processes it, and then when they are later encouraged by unbelieving friends to watch another R-rated movie with little or no edifying content figures, "Well, I still suspect this is a sin, but if Pastor watches R-rated movies I guess I should too." and ends up doing something they still suspect is Sinful. So I know that either I will need to caveat that reference, or perhaps even choose another illustration.

I am by no means the only Pastor to have to deal with this problem, as many of you know Charles Haddon Spurgeon used to exercise his own Christian liberty by smoking cigars, but when a Cigar company in London hear he smoked their brand and began to market their product using a picture of

Spurgeon smoking he stopped smoking entirely. As much as Spurgeon loved a good cigar, he loved the body of Christ far more, and he was more willing to sacrifice something he enjoyed than to possibly cause someone for whom Christ died to stumble and sin.

Now some would say, you are being overly scrupulous Spurgeon, it is *no sin to smoke, and if someone doesn't know that, that's their problem not yours*. Spurgeon, I think, would have pointed out that Christianity is not about proudly exercising our liberty, using superior knowledge of the faith as a defense, but has everything to do with loving the brethren, dying to self, and living for and serving the savior who died for them. He knew his primary calling was to glorify God in preaching His Gospel, and he was unwilling to let a matter of indifference become an impediment to doing that.

Paul too, in these verses is going to address the problem of pride, and how it can affect our Christian liberty. He is obviously addressing here an issue the Corinthian church had written to him about, that is why he starts out by saying ***“Now concerning things offered to idols”***.

They had written to him probably asking once again for a flat yes or no answer concerning to questions associated with eating meat. The first question most likely was can we eat meat that may have been or definitely was offered as a sacrifice to idols, and the second related question is may we eat at the feasts that regularly took place at the temple.

Question might seem odd to us today, but back then the temple was the center of social intercourse. It was where every important social function could be expected to occur. For instance in Corinth there were three great feasts associated with the Isthmian games, essentially the Olympic games, that all the elite members of the society would have been invited to. These feasts were celebrated at the temple and involved sacrifices. Now the games were not celebrated while Paul was in Corinth, so they had never had a reason to ask him about this.

Also, when the sacrifice was made at the temple, part was consumed in the offering, part given to the priests, and part kept by the offerer. More than the priests could ever consume themselves was given to the priest, so much of that given to them rather than allowing it to spoil was then sold in the market place. There are indications that in a city, this would have been the majority of the meat sold in the market.

Now the strong Corinthian Christians apparently would have said, ***look how can there be any harm in eating before a block of wood or stone, or buying and eating meat that was supposedly offered to something that doesn't really exist? In the end its just a meal and its just meat, and meat is actually a gift from God we are supposed to enjoy so don't worry about it.***

Paul doesn't address the issue of meat, he instead addresses their attitude. Yeah, their knowledge of the faith is right, but it is knowledge untempered by wisdom and most importantly love. That kind of knowledge does not edify, it only puffs up the person who supposedly has it.

Now I do want to emphasize that Paul is not saying that knowledge is bad, he is not a “know-nothing.” But rather that without a love of God and the brethren, even true doctrinal knowledge is something that like anything can be abused.

Calvin wrote: ***“Paul, however, did not mean, that this is to be reckoned as a fault attributable to learning — that those who are learned are often selfcomplacent, and have admiration of themselves,***

accompanied with contempt of others. Nor did he understand this to be the natural tendency of learning — to produce arrogance, but simply meant to show what effect knowledge has in an individual, that has not the fear of God, and love of the brethren; for the wicked abuse all the gifts of God, so as to exalt, themselves”

I unfortunately have seen exactly what Calvin warns of amongst the academic Reformed in particular. We are often the most “puffed” up, and the least concerned for other. It has been my experience that knowledge by itself is of no use, we must have knowledge and piety, which is why I strive to practice the warm experimental Calvinism of the Puritans which combines head and heart, knowledge and zeal, learning and love, rather than following some of the more strictly cerebral permutations of the Reformed faith.

Paul stresses in verse 3 that more important than knowing things about God, is loving God and thus showing that one is known by God. He also points out the limits of knowledge, that is that regardless of how much we know there is still much more we all don’t know, our knowledge is at best partial.

Now having rebuked the strong for their pride he does go on surprisingly to agree with the substance of their argument.

As unpopular as this sentiment is today. There really is only one true God, idols are nothing that is why he calls them “So-called gods” – and in Greek culture as in our own culture there were a plethora of false gods many Lords. But as Paul says there is only one God, and only one mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Talk about what this says about those who object to missionary activity. At the beginning of the century. Pearl S. Buck etc. “They are worshipping God in their own way.”

There are spiritual beings behind the idols, but not the ones the worshippers think of: *1 Cor. 10:20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.*

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

1 Titus 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

But even though they are right in their theology, they lack love for the weaker brother. These brothers were mostly recent converts not able to shake off the impression that the idol is somehow real, John MacArthur – “they had accepted that there is only one “right” god, but did not yet understand that there is only one real god”

They perhaps saw the example of the strong and followed it: Weaker brother gradually slips back into Paganism.

Knowledge is not the basis for our interaction with our brothers, love is. The problem is not whether to eat meat or not to eat meat the problem is pride. Yes food is a matter of indifference unless it causes my brother to fall into sin.

Applications: Strong – Obvious, beware causing your brother to sin. Watch out for bringing them into something they cannot do. Don't be the cause of making them slip back. You should be more willing as Paul said to **never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.**

Weak: Never go against conscience.

Romans 14:23 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.

Do not think you can do what you cannot

But do not make this the tyranny of the weaker brother, your job is to learn to grow.

Finally, there really is only one God, one mediator, one way. The greatest question is not how are you using your liberty, but do you understand the how a Christian comes by that liberty?

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law;[1] and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin;[2] from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation;[3] as also, in their free access to God,[4] and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind.[5] All which were common also to believers under the law.[6] But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected;[7] and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace,[8] and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.[9]