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1 Corinthians

But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 7:40

To complete chapter 7, Paul finishes his thought on the remarrying of a widow during the "present distress" which was mentioned in verse 26. He just noted that for a widow, "if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." Having said that, he states that the present time may not be the best time to get involved once again in marriage. His thoughts are that she will be "happier if she remains as she is."

This is only to be construed as a temporary thing during the "present distress" because in 1 Timothy 5, he gives the following instruction -

"But refuse *the* younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that *the* younger *widows* marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan." 1 Timothy 5:11-15

Whatever distress was occurring at the time of this letter to Corinth had passed or it didn't affect those in the area to which Timothy was working as a pastor. Therefore, his advice differs from 1 Corinthians 7. Continuing on concerning his words to the Corinthians, he says that they are "according to my judgment." This

refers back to verse 25 where he began this particular discourse on virgins and widows. In that verse he said, "I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy." Therefore, these are his judgments on an issue not explicitly explained by the Lord.

But this doesn't mean that his words are not authoritative. Instead, as an apostle and one who was under the influence of the Spirit, they bear the authority of the Lord, granted to him. And so he closes the chapter with, "and I think I also have the Spirit of God." These words don't indicate that he wasn't sure. Rather, as the Pulpit Commentary notes, "it is an expression of personal conviction that he has the Spirit, not an implied doubt of the fact." He understood the authority he possessed and that the Spirit was guiding him. In a polite manner, he reminds those in Corinth of this fact.

Life application: Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7 have been given under the influence of the Spirit and for the general edification and instruction of the church. Some of his words were directed solely to a period of "distress" that surrounded the church at that time. They must therefore be taken in that light and considered when times of distress surround believers at any point during the church age. Paul's words contain wisdom and exhortation, but not necessarily prescriptive commands for such times.

Let the elders who rule well be counted by all

As worthy of double honor and respect

Especially those who labor in the call

Of the word and doctrine which is pure and correct

For the Scripture says in its pages

"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain

And, "The laborer is worthy of his wages

Thus giving us sound advice once again

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

Paul now begins a new line of question answering, specifically that of "things offered to idols." The Corinthians had written him about various subjects and Paul is addressing them based on his comment of verse 7:1 which said, "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." With the items of chapter 7 complete, chapter 8 takes on this subject and it will consume the entire chapter which consists of just 13 verses.

The reason for their question and Paul's response should be obvious. Under the Mosaic Law, there were special dietary restrictions which applied to the faithful. They were extremely strict and they formed an important distinction between being a Jew and being a Gentile. The issue is addressed in the book of Acts, in Galatians, and elsewhere as well. In those accounts, what is relayed shows the immense importance of the matter for those in the new faith found in Christianity.

Unfortunately, as clearly as the issue of "foods" is explained in the New Testament, many have failed to heed the words and have fallen back on the Old Testament law in varying measure instead of relying on the grace of Christ. They again impose burdens which were set aside in the work of the Lord and place themselves under unnecessary bondage. Even Peter was found to fail in this regard and Paul had to correct him on the truth of the gospel.

If certain dietary restrictions were to arise within Christianity, we would find ourselves bound under a legalistic situation similar to the Levitical laws and thus we would be found attempting to obtain God's favor through works once again. The strong view concerning foods then is that all foods are acceptable and that any process of obtaining and eating those foods is unimportant.

However, there is more to the issue than merely denying "works" in order to be justified. There is the issue of conscience and knowledge which Paul will address

in a wise and clearly-stated manner. As the Pulpit Commentary notes about this verse -

"His liberality of thought shows itself in this - that he sides with those who took the strong, the broad, the common sense view, that sin is not a mechanical matter, and that sin is not committed where no sin is intended. He neither adopts the ascetic view nor does he taunt the inquirers with the fact that the whole weight of their personal desires and interests would lead them to decide the question in their own favour. On the other hand, he has too deep a sympathy with the weak to permit their scruples to be overruled with a violence which would wound their consciences. While he accepts the right principle of Christian freedom, he carefully guards against its abuse."

And so in order to show that there is, in fact, a contrast between conscience and knowledge and that both need to be harmoniously considered, he immediately introduces a parenthetical comment which begins with, "We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." Just because someone may have knowledge doesn't mean that their actions are appropriate. In essence, "Yes, I have knowledge that I can eat all foods, but how does that knowledge affect those around me? If it affects them in a negative manner by harming their conscience, then am I acting in love towards them?"

Additionally, Paul notes that "knowledge puffs up." In other words, having knowledge can lead me to being prideful in my knowledge which will inevitably lead to sin. He is returning to the metaphor he used in chapter 5 where "leaven" or "yeast" is used to make bread rise. The leaven is a picture of sin infecting our lives. As we sin, we become puffed up in our actions. Just because we have knowledge of a particular subject, it doesn't mean that it is right to use that knowledge if it will harm others. Instead, he states the contrasting truth that "love edifies."

He will continue his parenthetical thought in the next two verses before returning to the main line of reasoning. In this then, he is demonstrating wisdom in how he approaches this subject. He will hold the line on the truth that we are free in

Christ from all such restrictions that they have asked about, but we are not free to exercise that freedom while allowing others to be harmed in the process. Where there is doubt or misunderstanding, there needs to be instruction in the word of God. Once this is accomplished, then we can exercise our freedoms with a clear conscience.

Life application: It is not true that we have to avoid anything that others find offensive. In such a case, Christians wouldn't be Christians at all because the message of the cross is an offense; the truth that hell is real is an offense; and the truth that the only way to avoid hell is to be saved through the cross of Christ is certainly offensive. However, instruction on these (and all other points of doctrine) need to be explained. It would make no sense to say "You are going to hell" to a pagan without explaining why. Likewise, it is right to explain our freedoms in Christ to weaker Christians by opening the word and providing right instruction. After that, if they remain offended by what we eat or where we eat, it would be unreasonable to not go eat. Their offense has been explained in love and therefore there is no longer an obligation to refrain from acting in accord with the freedoms we are granted.

And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 1 Corinthians 8:2

Paul now introduces a thought directly related to what he said in verse 1. In that verse, he said, "We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies." It is true that everyone has a certain amount of knowledge, but for some having knowledge is believed to be an end in and of itself. They suppose the mere knowledge is a ticket to understanding everything that is necessary to control one's life and one's surroundings.

However, knowledge without a moral compass has led to many millions killed in war, to the falling of nations, to the subjugation of others, and to a complete lack of true goodness in the world. "If anyone thinks they know anything" then is speaking of the person who is satisfied with the head knowledge in the book, but feels there is nothing more which is needed.

In the case of the Bible, Paul would be speaking to the theologian who understood all of the mechanical aspects of the word - knowing Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; understanding the historical background of what the writers were relaying; grasping the literary forms found within the writings; etc. Such a person may feel that he has conquered the Bible and is therefore above those around him who are less educated. However, such a person may know "nothing yet as he ought to know."

God is certainly far more pleased with the uneducated high-school dropout who finds a heartfelt relationship with Christ than that stuffy professor who has never humbled himself at the foot of the cross. All of the knowledge in the world won't get a person one inch closer to salvation without the heart accompanying that knowledge. Only when that increased knowledge is accompanied by faith does it take on its true purpose. As we grow in understanding, we should also grow in glorifying God, empathizing with those around us, walking in love with others, and applying the Bible to our every step. This is wisdom then - the correct application of knowledge toward the things of God.

Life application: If your heart is right with Christ, you are in the sweetest spot of all. Don't feel your walk with the Lord is lacking just because your level of knowledge is minimal. You will learn as you study, but you will do it on the wise path of mixing your knowledge with your love of the Lord.

*Knowing everything about the Bible is a good thing, we know
But without love, just what good is that knowledge to us?
So what if I know Hebrew and Greek and put on linguistic show
How much closer does that get me to Jesus?*

*I could know every detail of every story found in this book
And when someone cited it wrong, I could make a giant fuss
But if I never open up my heart and take a good look*

How could I expect to be pleasing to Jesus?

Instead, the heartfelt faith of a child is such an important thing

Walking humbly with the Lord should be the goal of each of us

When we speak, of the Lord our voices should ring

I know that these will surely bring a smile to my Lord, Jesus

But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. 1 Corinthians 8:3

This verse completes the parenthetical phrase which began in 8:1. In this, one might expect Paul to say, "But if anyone loves God, that person knows Him." However, this would only lead to more ego within an already puffed up church. It is possible to know God in a general sense, but it is impossible for a finite man to know the infinite God in His fullness. And so he uses the passive "is known by Him" rather than the active "knows Him." He states the same type of thought in 2 Timothy 2:19 - "The Lord knows those who are His..."

Such nuances in communication are essential to recognize. An important thought which requires understanding the nuance of what is being said is found in 1 John 4:8 –

"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

John says that "God is love" but this cannot be turned around to say "love is God." There is a definite article in front of God - "the God." God is not limited to love, but it is a definition of His character that we can understand. Again, Paul uses this same type of wording in Galatians 4:9 as when he says, "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God..." It is true that the Galatians (and the Corinthians) "know God" but it is only in a limited way.

Understanding this then we can then apply what Paul is relaying to the context of the rest of the parenthetical statement. He is using what is known as a *metalepsis* for us to grasp his intent. A metalepsis is a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is used in a new context. A good example of this is, "I need to go and catch a worm tomorrow." This leads to the common expression that "The early bird catches the worm." This means to get an early start on the day and thus to be successful in whatever endeavor is intended. The subject "I" in the first phrase is compared to the subject "early bird" in the next.

He is substituting "love" with "knowledge" in order to show that love is the principle thought in that which edifies. In our love of God, we are "known by Him." Such should be the case in our love of others then. The main subject of this chapter is "food sacrificed to idols" as mentioned in verse 1. We can have completely accurate knowledge about the subject and yet err in our handling of it. If we fail to act in love towards others (who have less knowledge than we do) in the use of our knowledge, then we will fall short of what God expects.

As Barnes notes on this topic, "...a man should not be guided in his contact with others by mere knowledge, however great that may be; but that a safer and better principle was 'love, charity,' ... whether exercised toward God or man. Under the guidance of this, man would be in little danger of error. Under the direction of mere knowledge he would never be sure of a safe guide."

It was important for Paul to include this parenthesis at the beginning in order to establish the truth that knowledge is no substitute for love, but love mixed with knowledge is necessary to complete the picture in the guidance he will present.

Life application: The subtle nuances of how words are used in Scripture are important to pay attention to. When we grasp what is being relayed, we can then act on the matter appropriately. Love is necessary when exhibiting knowledge on a matter in order to ensure that the weaker in knowledge isn't further weakened in his faith. Having said this, no matter how delicately one handles an issue, people will almost always find offense in religious and political dialogue.

Eventually, one can "love" another to the point where nothing at all can be said. This is a trap the Christian must also avoid.

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.

1 Corinthians 8:4

"Therefore" begins the main discourse of the subject at hand, and yet it is relying on the parenthetical statement he just finished. The thought process thus far goes as follows:

- 1) Now concerning things offered to idols:
 - a) We know that we all have knowledge.
 - b) Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.
 - c) (linked to 1a) If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.
 - d) (linked to 1b) But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.
- 2) Therefore.... (after considering 1a-1d)

When the Bible gives a "therefore" it is always important to go back and see what it is there for.

And so to begin his discourse on the subject, he reiterates the first half of verse 1 again by saying, "concerning the eating of things offered to idols." In essence, "Now that I have explained to you a more important issue which is directly connected to your question, I will now answer your question." And he does so immediately by saying, "we know that an idol is nothing in the world."

In this, his direct response is tied to "knowledge" as mentioned in 1a above. Everyone who has called on Christ should intuitively realize that an idol is nothing. It is a part of the creation and has no ability to change the outcome of anything. If something is sacrificed to it, it has no more ability to respond to the sacrifice than does a handful of dirt or a cup of water. Because this so, then the sacrifice has no

meaning either. It was a futile gesture to a futile non-god. And this is all the more certain because, "*there is no other God but one.*" This short phrase was preceded by "and that" which again ties it to 1a - "and that *there is no other God but one.*"

This is knowledge which every believer should certainly possess because they have rejected all other religious systems and have called on Christ as Lord. If He is Lord, He is God and there is none other. This is knowledge that should be certain. But though understood in some measure by all true believers, it may not have been properly processed by all of them. This will inevitably cause a conflict in them when considering the issue of food sacrificed to idols. When it does, their faith may be challenged. Before addressing this though, Paul will continue to speak concerning "knowledge" for two more verses.

Life application: When reading the Bible, it is a good habit to reconsider what was previously stated when coming to prepositions such as "for," "and," "but," "therefore," and etc. If the context is still unclear, try mapping it out in a simple manner and re-considering the context. This will often open up the passage to what is intended by the writer.

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords)... 1 Corinthians 8:5

Continuing on with his thoughts concerning knowledge and love, Paul introduces a hypothetical argument using words translated as "for even if." It is important to understand that Paul is not implying that there truly are other gods, but that this is what people may think in their confused world view. Even the Old Testament speaks in this manner. From the law itself, Moses shows that there are "many gods and many lords" -

"For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe." Deuteronomy 10:17

People all over the world bow to things they think are "gods" even though they aren't. The words in the Bible, including the quote from Deuteronomy and from Paul's words here, are meant to indicate the *belief* by some that these gods exist, but not that they actually do. They are no more real than the imagination of those who follow them. These "so called gods" are everywhere in the world and are to be found in all cultures. Some are found in "heaven" in the minds of those who follow them.

In this thought include the "gods" of Greek and Roman culture such as Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, etc. Also there are the heavenly gods in the stars and constellations, and so forth. Then of course, there were (and still are) representations of them on street corners and in temples in every location. These would be the gods "on earth." But there were other such earthly gods - Caesar was proclaimed a living god; trees were believed to be divine; and certain mountains or valleys may have been believed to be places of divine presence. Even Paul and Barnabas were proclaimed gods after performing a miracle in Jesus' name -

"Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' ¹² And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes." Acts 14:11-13

The apostles obviously argued against this, stating that the people "should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them." (Acts 14:15). This is the type of thing Paul is speaking of in verse 8:5. As noted, he is merely making a hypothetical argument. He is not arguing for the validity of such "gods."

He is relaying that some believe that there are other "gods" for a reason which will become evident in the coming verses and his thoughts are directed toward a loving attitude concerning our handling of delicate issues in the presence of those

who still struggle with these things. As the thought progresses, keep in mind that "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."

Life application: When reviewing verses in the Bible, context must be carefully considered. Jesus quoted a verse from the Old Testament about "gods" which is often misused even from the pulpit today to indicate that we are divine beings when we come to Christ. Such is not the case, but error can creep in easily when individual verses are taken out of their intended context.

...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.* 1 Corinthians 8:6

Continuing on with his "knowledge" portion of "things offered to idols" Paul finishes up with this verse. He has just noted that "there are many gods and many lords." In this, he meant in *perception*, not in *reality* as can be seen in this verse. "Yet for us *there is one God.*" Unlike the rest of the unregenerate world, we possess the knowledge of the absolute truth that there is one God. This is then in contradistinction to the lie that there are "many gods."

This one God is "the Father." In this, Paul is not speaking of the Father within the Godhead as separate and distinct from the Son and the Holy Spirit. Rather, he is using the term "Father" when speaking of God in the absolute sense. This one God is our Father. We know this is the sense in which he is speaking because he does not use the term "Son" when speaking of Jesus in the coming words. Instead, he will speak of Jesus in parallel thought. Therefore, "one God, the Father" is God who is the Father, "of whom *are all things.*"

God our Father is the Source of all things. They exist because He wills them to exist and nothing exists apart from His will. There is no other God and all of creation was created by Him, "and we for Him." This refers to His faithful believers who have put their hope in the Messiah. We were created for Him and

by Him to be a praise and a glory to Him. God so intended this and His will is effected in our existence and in our state in Him.

In parallel to that, Paul continues with "and one Lord Jesus Christ." It is important to note the absence of the word "Son" to understand properly. It is parallel to, not in addition to, his prior words concerning "the Father." Again, his previous verse noted that "there are many gods and many lords," a set of parallels - "gods" and "lords." He first addressed "gods" as opposed to the one "God." He now addresses "lords" as opposed to "one Lord Jesus Christ."

Understanding this is important because aberrant cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, try to subordinate Jesus by inaccurately analyzing this verse... "See there is one God, the Father, and so Jesus isn't God." Such misrepresentations fail to accurately handle God's word issued through Paul's hand. This "one Lord Jesus Christ" is "through whom *are* all things." It is set in parallel with the note about the Father "of whom *are* all things." God is the Source and Jesus is the member within that Source by which all things came into being; He is the Word of God (see John 1:1).

Finally, Paul says that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, "through whom we *live*." This is parallel to the thought concerning God the Father which said "and we for Him." Jesus is the Creator and He is the Re-generator. We exist physically because of Him and we are spiritually quickened by Him when we receive Him. All is a work of God and all is by Jesus Christ.

Life application: When you pray to Jesus, you are praying to God. When you pray through Jesus, you are praying through our Mediator to the Godhead. Jesus is God and Jesus is our Lord. By carefully examining Scripture in its intended context, we can see that there is no division between Jesus and God, and yet there is a Godhead in which the three Persons of the Trinity exist.

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. 1 Corinthians 8:7

Paul has been speaking of "knowledge" "concerning things offered to idols" for the past two verses. He now enters into the fact that "not everyone" has that knowledge by stating "however." This then is in contrast to what should be obvious, but it is knowledge which is lacking in some for whatever reason. And so he continues by saying that "for some, with consciousness of the idol." There is a definite hindrance in their ability to accept anything offered to that idol, even though it is actually nothing at all.

Their conscience tells them that if something was offered to an idol and they were to "eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol," then they have somehow done something wrong. As an understandable example, suppose you were to go to the local Buddhist temple because they have a great farmer's market there. While there, you see meat being sold too. Because you're a big fan of steak, pork chops, and lamb cutlets, you decide to buy a few of each. But then you hear that the animals were sacrificed first as an offering to the idol at the temple, is it ok to buy that meat now or not?

Paul has just said that "an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one." After that, he clearly explained what he meant in the next two verses. And so the answer is "Yes, you may buy the meat." Your conscience tells you that there is no God but one and you know that the sacrifice has no validity at all. Therefore, your conscience on this matter is undefiled and your devotion to God through Jesus Christ is unhindered when you buy and eat those tasty delights.

However, there is another consideration to be made. Those who have a conscience about the idol, not understanding that it is nothing in all the world, may not recognize your liberty in Christ. This is because "their conscience, being weak, is defiled." If you buy and eat meat in the presence of someone like this, what will be the result? Paul will continue to analyze this situation, explaining that

love for that weaker brother is more important than your correct knowledge of the matter. He will also further address the issue later in the book. As he said when he began this chapter, "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."

Life application: If you find yourself in a situation where you may harm the conscience of a weaker brother, what you need to do is first act in love and not do what would cause them greater confusion. After that, you should take the time to properly instruct them in the matter, showing them directly from the word of God what is correct. Once you have done this, you have shown love and respect for them and validated the stand by God's standard. If after that, they still disagree, you can do no more. They have willingly failed to see the true intent of the matter because there is no higher authority than what God has presented through His word.

To understand this, think of an issue from the US Constitution, owning a gun for example. If you have a gun and another person says, "You shouldn't own a gun; that is just wrong." All you need to do is take them to the 2nd Amendment and read it to them. After that, you show them your permit which authorizes you to own the gun within whatever state you belong to and maybe you even take time to show them your bill of sale. If they still say (and most lefties will) that you shouldn't own a gun, then disregard what they say. You are no longer under any obligation to be concerned with their conscience. It was defiled, you attempted to show them the valid proofs of their error, and they rejected the proofs. You can do no more. Go enjoy target practice without them.