

# Love: The Guardrail On Our Liberty

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Sunday, March 17th, 2024

Key Text: 1 Cor. 8:1-13

Key Words: “Knowledge,” “Liberty” & “Love”

**1 Cor. 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.

**1 Cor. 8:4** 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.

**1 Cor. 8:7** 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.

# Another Question to Be Answered

**1 Cor. 7:1** Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: ...

- **Paul is continuing to work his way through the questions the Corinthians had written to him concerning how to live faithfully as Christians.**

**1 Cor. 8:1** Now concerning things offered to idols:

- **This was a major concern to the young church because they had been saved out of an idolatrous culture.**

**Acts 17:16** Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

***Greek and Roman culture was riddled with false gods and idols for everything and for every occasion.***

Many in the church at Corinth knew the truth and felt no guilt in eating meat offered to idols.

**1 Cor. 8:1** Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge.

**John 8:32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

- **What knowledge did those writing to Paul have?**
- **1 Cor. 8:4-6** ...we know 1. that an idol is nothing in the world, and 2. that there is no other God but one. ...3. That for us there is one God...
- **So, they were asking, “Since we know all these things are true, don’t we have the liberty to eat whatever we want?”**

***This set the stage for Paul to place a guardrail on their liberty. These believers had knowledge. But they still lacked something.***

# The guardrail on Christian liberty is love.

**1 Cor. 8:1** Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies [i.e. love builds up].

- **Knowledge is good. The liberty that comes from knowing the truth is also good. But this liberty based on knowledge by itself is not enough. Liberty must be governed by love.**

**1 Cor. 13:2** And though I ... understand all mysteries and all knowledge, ... but have not love, I am nothing.

- **Knowledge by itself can produce feelings of superiority over others who have not become so “enlightened” as you.**

**Eph. 4:15** but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things...

***So, as important as knowing sound doctrine is, it is not a license to do harm to others and break the unity of Christ's church.***

# The unity of Jewish and Gentile believers was at stake.

**Acts 15:23** They wrote this, letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no such commandment— 25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

***Paul has to deliver this decision while holding to His gospel.***

**The Council in Jerusalem had been held in 48 AD.**

Paul arrived in Corinth a year later in 49 AD and he wrote this first letter to the Corinthians in around 53 AD from Ephesus while he was serving there for 3 years, from 52-54 AD.

This decision of the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem was to require the gentile believers to “abstain from things offered to idols,” This was now binding on all Christians.

So, Paul is saying, “Yes, many of you Corinthians know you have liberty in Christ to eat whatever you want, but you should put the interests of others and the unity in Christ’s church ahead of your own personal liberty.

# Our love for God and His church must govern how we exercise the liberty we have.

**1 Cor. 8:1** Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

- **Love builds up others.**
- **God knows who loves Him by the way they use their liberty to love and serve others, rather than just using it to please themselves.**

***The question is, can you know you are right about something without becoming a self-centered jerk?***

What these Corinthians knew about God and about idolatry was true, and their liberty was real.

**I Cor. 8:4** 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.

- **This is all good theology. Yet, if they act on this knowledge without any loving consideration for how doing so will affect others, they still know nothing as they should.**

***To act upon what they know, without loving consideration for those who still do not yet know what they know, would do great harm to everyone— hence the Jerusalem decision.***

# “Not everyone knows what you know.”

**I Cor. 8:7** 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.

- **Weak consciences could not abide eating temple meats.**

**I Cor. 8:8** 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.

- **There is nothing wrong with eating any particular food.**
- **“The problem is, weaker brethren don’t know that.”**

**I Cor. 8:9** But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

***By using our liberty we could cause weaker Christians to stumble into violating their conscience and thereby “perishing.”***

**We should never violate our conscience as it is.**

- **When it comes “issues of conscience” we should be careful not to violate our own conscience as it currently stands.**

**Rom. 14:14** I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

- **Even when there is really nothing wrong with what we want to do, if we *think it is wrong* then for us *it is wrong*.**
- **If we are uncertain, we should wait until we are certain.**
- **By studying God’s Word on an issue, praying for guidance and seeking the counsel of our local church elders we may come to a more accurate understanding of what is right.**

***But even then, it may not be the loving thing for us to do.***

# Conscience must be set to God's standard.

**Rom. 14:14** I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ...20 ... All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats [while causing] offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. 22 Do you have faith [that a thing is allowed]? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 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.

***Whether we are dealing with Gentile Christians eating meat offered idols or Jewish Christians violating the dietary laws, it is our love for them that must guide us in how we use our liberty.***

# So, back to Corinth.

**1 Cor. 8:10** 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?

- **When they see you they may think its okay for them too.**

**1 Cor. 8:11** And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish [i.e. come to ruin], for whom Christ died? **12** But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

- **This weaker brother is a member of Christ's body.**

**Therefore, to do him harm is to do harm to Christ Himself.**

**1 Cor. 8:13** Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

***Paul is willing to forego the use of his liberty for the sake of others.***

# Don't worry about what you cannot know.

**1 Cor. 10:23** All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. [There is the "guardrail of love!"] 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; 26 for "the earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness." 27 If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness." 29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? 30 But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? 31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

***"When you know the meat is temple meat, don't eat it."***

# The Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem got it right.

- **Love for those who have a weaker conscience than our own is the guardrail God has established for how we use our liberty.**

**Acts 15:23** ...The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. 24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law”—to whom we gave no such commandment— 25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ...28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

***With this decision, Jewish & Gentile Christians can enjoy fellowship.***

# So, where does this leave us?

- **It is good to have a true knowledge of sound gospel doctrine concerning the liberty we have under the Lordship of Christ.**
- **However, not everyone has the same knowledge and so they cannot all participate in the same level of liberty as you may.**
- **If you love them as you should, you will allow your love to limit the way you use your liberty by denying yourself.**
- **Never encourage others to violate their conscience as it is.**
- **You also should remain true to your own conscience as it is.**
- **You are not bound to live by the consciences of someone else.**
- **Even when you realize something is allowed, let your love for others serve as the guardrail for how you use your liberty.**
- **Submit to the Apostles and Elders Council's decision even though you know you have liberty in Christ to do otherwise.**

# **And so, again, I plead with you:**

**2Cor. 13:5** Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

- **Look closely at yourself to see if Christ is truly in you by faith through the presence of the Spirit.**
- **If your conscience bothers you about anything, don't violate your conscience as it is.**
- **Study God's Word and seek wise counsel on whether or not you have a weak conscience.**
- **Be ready to deny yourself for the sake of others.**

***Allow love to be the guardrail on your use of liberty.***

# Let Us Respond to God!

**Heb. 3:15** “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...”

- **Let your Elders play their proper part in your Christian life.**

**James 5:13** Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. **16** Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

***Let us pray for one another, and pray with one another in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit through God's Word.***