

Limits of Our Liberty

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1 Corinthians 8:1-13

PREINTRODUCTION

1. We are returning this morning to our study of 1 Corinthians.
2. Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 8.
3. Today we are looking at the entire chapter (verses 1-13).
4. So that we have the context in our minds, I will begin reading at verse 1 through the end of the chapter.

BIBLE VERSE

1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. 2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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?

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

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

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.

INTRODUCTION

1. Paul begins now to answer another question the Corinthians had and that was “concerning things sacrificed to idols” (v.1).
2. The phrase “now concerning” first appeared in chapter 7, verse 1 as Paul began to answer their questions about singleness and marriage.
3. He uses this phrase again in chapter 12, verse 1 regarding spiritual gifts and chapter 16, verse 1 regarding the collection.
4. But now in chapter 8, he begins his addressing of christian liberty.
5. We are free in Christ because Christ has set us free.

6. Free now to do righteousness but not sin.
7. But the liberty we enjoy has limits.
8. Verse 9 says, “But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”
9. Because there are both weak and strong Christians in the church, we must be careful not to cause a weak brother or sister to stumble at our liberty.
10. Paul says in verse 13, “If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.”
11. This applies not just to food or specifically meat that was sacrificed to idols but also other areas that we would consider to be gray areas.
12. Gray areas are things that are not specifically addressed in the Bible.
13. They are issues that Scripture does not take a dogmatic stance on, or at the very least, issues that Scripture does not discuss in depth.

14. Instead, the Bible gives Christians the liberty to make God-glorifying decisions based on their convictions.

15. There are questions we can ask to help us with gray areas:

1. Will it benefit me spiritually? First Corinthians 10:23 says, “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

2. Will it put me in bondage? First Corinthians 6:12 says, “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.” Any questionable practice that can be habit-forming is not wise to pursue.

3. Will it defile God’s temple? First Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” We should not do anything with our bodies that would dishonor the Lord.

4. Will it cause others to stumble? First Corinthians 8:8-9 says, “Food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” One should refrain from using his freedom in an area which might cause others to sin. For “by

sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore,” Paul said, “if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.”

5. Will it help the cause of evangelism? First Corinthians 10:32-33 says, “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved.” We must think of the effect any practice might have on our testimony to the lost.
6. Will it violate my conscience? First Corinthians 10:25-29 contains three references to abstaining from a certain practice “for conscience’ sake.” And Romans 14:23 says, “He who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.” If we are not sure whether an action is pleasing to God, we should not do it. That way our conscience will remain clear and our relationship to God will not be hindered.
7. Will it bring glory to God? First Corinthians 10:31 summarizes all these principles by saying, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the

glory of God.”

16. Paul begins 1 Corinthians 8 with the phrase, “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols.”
17. Things sacrificed to idols is one word in Greek and can be translated simply as “idol sacrifices.”
18. The sacrifices were food offerings, symbolically presented in worship to the god in whose temple they were given.
19. The particular issue was that of eating food that had been offered in those sacrifices.
20. The Greeks and Romans were polytheistic, worshiping many gods.
21. They had a god, or a group of gods, for every circumstance, every need, and every activity of any consequence.
22. They had a god of war, a goddess of love, a god of travel, a goddess of justice, and on and on.
23. They were also polydemonistic, believing in many evil spirits.
24. They believed the air was filled with evil spirits of all sorts.

25. Giving food sacrifices, which were usually meat, was of great importance in regard to both of those beliefs.
26. It was believed that the evil spirits were constantly trying to invade human beings and that the easiest way to do that was to attach themselves to food before it was eaten.
27. The only way the spirits could be removed from food was through its being sacrificed to a god.
28. The sacrifice therefore served two purposes; it gained the favor of the god and cleansed the meat from demonic contamination. (MacArthur, John F., Jr. 1 Corinthians. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.)

Paul says...



We Know That We All Have Knowledge (vv.1-6)

A. THIS STATEMENT WAS TRUE BUT EGOTISTICAL (V.1A)

1. It reflected a feeling of superiority.

2. The believers who made the claim were suggesting they had more than enough knowledge and understanding of God's Word to know that pagan gods and idols were not real and that food sacrificed to them was still just food.
 3. They knew that eating the food could not contaminate them spiritually, that it had no affect on their Christian lives.
 4. They felt totally free to eat whatever they wanted, no matter what others thought.
 5. So Paul says, "we know that we have all knowledge."
 6. Knowledge is good and can be helpful
 7. Proverbs 1:7 (NASB) The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
 8. Knowledge is good when it helps us to understand what the Bible teaches about idols
1. You ask, "What is an idol?" An idol is a physical representation of a deity, usually used as an object of worship (Curtis, Edward M. "Idol, Idolatry." Ed. David Noel Freedman. The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary 1992 : 376. Print.)

2. We are not to have idols or bow down to them – Exodus 20:3-5 (NASB) “You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.

3. 1 John 5:21 (NASB) Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Biblical knowledge about idols helps us to understand that in reality....

B. IDOLS DO NOT EXIST (V1.B)

1. Psalms 115:4-8 (NASB) Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man’s hands. 5 They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; 6 They have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell; 7 They have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat. 8 Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.

2. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:4, “We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world.”
3. In chapter 10, verses 19-20 he states it again but adds that idols are “...the things which Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God.”
4. He says in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 6, there exist only “One God, the Father” and “One Lord, Jesus Christ”
5. In Ephesians 4:4 he says “there is...one Spirit.”
6. He already mentioned the Holy Spirit In chapter 6, verse 19, and the One “who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own”

So, knowledge about idols is good because essentially they do not exist but knowledge alone is not enough. WHY?

C. KNOWLEDGE MAKES ARROGANT (V.1C)

1. It’s good to have knowledge but it must be used correctly
2. Paul says “knowledge makes arrogant”
3. “Arrogant” is the Greek word phusioo

4. It means “inflating something with air” or “to be inflated” (LTW) or “puffed up” but used metaphorically it means “to make proud” (ANLEX)
5. Knowledge can lead to arrogance
6. Instead of it being a strength it becomes a sin
7. Verses 11-12 says, “For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died, 12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.”
8. Albert Barnes says, "Mere knowledge, or science, when the heart is not right, fills with pride; swells a man with vain self-confidence and reliance in his own powers, and very often leads him entirely astray. Knowledge combined with right feelings, with pure principles, with a heart filled with love to God and men, may be trusted: but not mere intellectual attainments; mere abstract science; the mere cultivation of the intellect. Unless the heart is cultivated with that, the effect of knowledge is to make a man a pedant; to fill him with vain ideas of his own importance; and thus to lead him into error and to sin." (Notes on the New Testament: I Corinthians. Ed. Robert Frew. London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885. Print.)

So Paul concludes verse 1 by saying...

D. LOVE EDIFIES (VV.1D-6)

1. It builds up
2. It considers others before ones self
3. In the words of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NASB) 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
4. If I love my brother or sister then it will depict how I use my knowledge
5. I won't just say that a weak Christian has no knowledge. I'll say I love my weak brother or sister and not cause them to violate their conscience
6. Because supposing to know anything and being without love is nothing; it benefits no one (v.2) "but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him" (v.3)

7. So we need both knowledge and love because love will show us how to apply the knowledge we have
8. Albert Barnes again says, "The man who is influenced by love, ever pure and ever glowing, is not in much danger of going astray, or of doing injury to the cause of God. The man who relies on his knowledge is heady, high-minded, obstinate, contentious, vexatious, perverse, opinionated; and most of the difficulties in the church arise from such men. Love makes no difficulty, but heals and allays all: mere knowledge heals or allays none, but is often the occasion of most bitter strife and contention. (Notes on the New Testament: I Corinthians. Ed. Robert Frew. London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885. Print.)
9. So there are no idols
10. "The is no God but one" (v.4) and if there were (v.5), "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" (v.6)

2

Not All Men Have This Knowledge (vv.7-13)

A. SOME DEFILE THEIR CONSCIENCE BY EATING (VV.7-8)

1. But what is food? (v.8)
2. Romans 14:17 (NASB) for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
3. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NASB) Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

QUOTE

We are to bear in mind that the heathen were exceedingly ignorant; and that their former notions and superstitious feelings about the gods whom their fathers worshipped, and whom they had adored, would not soon leave them, even on their conversion to Christianity.

Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: I Corinthians.
Ed. Robert Frew. London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885. Print.

B. OUR LIBERTY IS NOT TO CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE (VV.9-13)

1. Paul urged this same caution to the believers at Rome

1. Romans 14:13 (NASB) Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.

2. Romans 14:15-16 (NASB) For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.
16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil.

2. We are to build one another up not tear down with our liberty

1. Romans 15:1-3 (NASB) 1 Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. 2 Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”

2. Romans 15:7 (NASB) 7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

3. Don’t flaunt your liberty (vv.10-13)

1. “If someone sees you” (v.10)
 2. “If he is weak” (v.10)
 3. “He who is weak is ruined” (v.11)
 4. “By sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ” (v.12)
4. Do not cause your brother to stumble (v.13)

3

Conclusion

APPLICATION

1. There are many Christians guilty of causing their brother or sister to stumble over things they are at liberty to do
2. Like drinking, the Bible doesn't prohibit it. It prohibits drunkenness. But one who is weak can be caused to stumble
3. If you continue to do this you wounding their conscience and sinning against Christ
4. So apply verse 13 and put in it whatever you're at liberty to do: “Therefore, if _____ causes my brother to stumble, I will never _____ again, so that I will not cause my brother

to stumble.”

5. Are you a Christian?
6. Then consider what Paul is saying and give heed.
7. If you're not a Christian, becoming one is not an option, it's a command to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ
8. The Gospel is that Jesus took your sin on Himself and died in your place.
9. Upon believing in Him, which means surrendering your life to Him, you can be saved from your sin, Satan and more importantly God's wrath.
10. So I urge you to repent and commit your life to Jesus.
11. Let's pray.