

## Loving the Weaker Brother

1 Corinthians 8; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; 9-11-2022

**Now concerning things sacrificed to idols,** The second question that the Corinthian Church asked Paul was in regard to food or meat sacrificed to idols: ‘Is it alright to eat meat sacrificed to idols? In the temple of the idol? In unbeliever’s homes? In our own homes?’ **we know that we all have knowledge.** This was likely a motto of the Corinthians that they used to justify eating meat sacrificed to idols wherever and whenever they wanted. The implication being: ‘If we know the truth, can’t we just act according to what we know?’ **Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. (1)** Paul does not disagree that knowledge of the truth is important and should shape what we do. But he does disagree that knowledge of the truth can be used to justify doing whatever we want in any situation. The goal should be to act according to love, not simply according to the knowledge of the truth. **If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; (2)** If knowledge produces pride instead of love, it shows our true ignorance of the truth. The more we truly understand about the truth, the more humble and loving we should be. The more we know, the more we realize that we do not know. **but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. (3)** The most important knowledge is God’s knowledge of us, not our knowledge in itself. And we can know that God knows us in a saving relationship, if our knowledge of the truth produces love for God and therefore, love for others. Knowledge is meant to move us to love God and others. To love God is to be pleased with God above all and to live to please God above all. **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. (4)** Paul agrees with those who affirm that idols are not real gods since there is only one true God. So idols are really no-things that do not do anything in this world, including impacting meat. **For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, (5)** There were many so-called gods in the ancient world (mythological gods) that people worshiped and there are real spiritual beings (angels and demons) in the unseen realm that impact the world, but neither of these are divine or should be worshiped. **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. (6)** Paul affirms that there is one God who exists in the Person of the Father (who is the creator or source of all things) and in the Person of the Son, Jesus (who is the means or mediator of all things). This God is the only One with whom we have to be concerned and the only One who determines how we should live. **However not all men have this knowledge;** Not every believer is in the same place when it comes to understanding the truth of God and the implications of it for everyday life. In this case, Paul is saying that not every Christian in Corinth was convinced regarding the non-existence of other gods in any and every sense. **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. (7)** There are believers who are weak in faith and therefore, weak in conscience with regard to certain matters. In this case, there were believers who were weak in faith (with regard to what is true or not) in regard to the non-existence of gods and their having no impact on meat sacrificed to them. As a result, they were also weak in conscience (with regard to what is right or wrong) and thought it was wrong to eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. **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. (8)** This may have been another motto of the Corinthians. Or it could be Paul’s rebuke of some who argued that eating meat sacrificed to idols with the

knowledge that there are no such things as idols, would be a great exercise of Christian freedom. Either way, Paul is arguing that eating is not an activity that, in itself, makes us more or less pleasing to God. So eating is not a moral issue, per se. **But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. (9)** Paul agrees that there is Christian freedom that is rooted in the truth of God. But his concern is whether the Christians in Corinth were more concerned about exercising their freedoms or loving one another. A ‘stumbling block’ is that which causes someone to fall into sin and possibly, to fall away from the faith altogether. Paul is arguing that Christian freedom should be limited by love for others. **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? (10)** A ‘weak’ Christian is someone who is weak in faith (regarding what is true) and weak in conscience (regarding what is right and wrong) and could easily be led to sin against their conscience by the example and encouragement of other believers who do not share their concerns. Paul argues that a ‘strong’ Christian might exercise his freedom to eat meat in an idol’s temple and by that example encourage a ‘weak’ Christian to do the same and thereby, violate his own conscience. **For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. (11)** Paul argues that if we encourage those who are weak (through example and words) to do what they believe is sin, we move them toward possible spiritual ruin and maybe even into actual spiritual ruin if they return to the worship of other gods. If Christ died for our brothers and sisters in Christ, certainly we should be willing to give up our rights and freedoms in certain circumstances or in certain ways in order to pursue their spiritual good. In that sense, if Christ died for our brothers and sisters, so should we. **And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. (12)** Paul adds that not only are we sinning against our brothers and sisters by leading them into sin, we are also sinning against Christ who died to deliver them from sin. What is done to believers, is done to Christ. **Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble. (13)** Paul says that if he has to give up eating meat altogether in order to prevent a weaker brother from sinning and possibly falling away, then he would do so. Paul doesn’t want to sin himself and he doesn’t want to do anything that encourages others or leads others to sin either.

## Application

1. Love is not the freedom to do whatever I want. - *Galatians 5:13-14*
2. Love is the goal of knowledge. - *1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13*
3. Love is concerned about the good of others. – *Romans 15:1-3*
4. Love is ready to sacrifice for the good of others. – *1 John 3:16*
5. Love is not simply trying not to offend others. – *Matthew 15:12-14; Romans 14:1-4*