

Last time we began to address a common situation facing the first century church. People were being saved out of pagan backgrounds. They used to worship idols. They used to participate in acts of devotion to these idols, often in conjunction with sacrifices made at temples to these gods. They used to eat meat offered to these gods as an expression of their worship.

When God opened their eyes to their need of Christ, they repented and believed in Him. They were saved! But they had a lot of baggage. Should they eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols?

Some Christians felt it was okay. Others, especially those who were once really enslaved to the pagan idolatry before Christ saved them, had a big problem with it. This became a big controversy in the Corinthian church.

We may face different specifics today, but the same basic issue faces us. How do we deal with practices from our pre-Christian days? That's what 1 Corinthians 8 is all about.

In dealing with the problem, Paul first gives some general observations, then some specific counsel. Let's review what we learned last time as we prepare to answer this question.

Review...

I. General observations to prepare for dealing with controversies (1-3)

Three observations...

A. We have knowledge (1a).

1. *We know things we didn't use to know.*

When you became a Christian, you didn't learn all at once everything there is to know about the Christian life. That means that people who have been saved awhile know some things that newer believers don't.

2. *We know things others still don't know.*

That's not a criticism of others, either. It takes time to learn. And patience on everyone's part.

B. We need to be aware of the tendencies of knowledge (1b).

1. *Knowledge can become self-focused.*

2. *Love focuses on the good of others.*

C. We need to be aware of the deficiencies of knowledge (2-3).

1. *Knowledge is limited (2).*

2. *Love is commended (3).*

Here's the point. The church is made up of people who are at different levels when it comes to knowing truth. That dynamic could and would aggravate controversy were it not for this mutual commitment and responsibility. We are to *love each other*.

II. Specific counsel for dealing with the problem of food offered to idols (4-13)

He gives three guidelines...

A. Start by affirming the truth (4-6).

In this section Paul speaks especially to the mature Christians about what they know (in contrast to the newer Christians in the church who have yet to learn these truths). We know about three subjects...

1. *We know the truth about idols (4-5).*
 - An idol is nothing.
 - There is one true God.
2. *We know the truth about the Father (6a).*
 - All things came from Him.
 - We are to live for Him.
3. *We know the truth about the Lord Jesus (6b).*
 - All things came through Him.
 - We are to live through Him.

B. Recognize there are those who don't yet know this truth (7-8).

Namely, we're talking about the younger believers. Why don't they know the truth yet? They haven't had time!

1. *They have wrong ideas about idols (7).*
 - Idols are real.
 - Food offered to idols is defiled.
2. *They need to learn the truth (8).*
 - Spirituality isn't linked to what you eat.
 - Food itself is neutral.

But what should happen *until* the "weak" believers learn these truths? What should the mature believers do when it comes to eating meat once offered to idols? Guideline #3...

New Material...

C. Act on the basis of love, not just knowledge (9-13).

To do so I must act in light of the following three principles...

1. *What I do can be a stumbling block to a weak brother (9-11).*

Read verses 9-11.

- If I eat meat in a temple, it's just a good meal.
- If my weak brother does, he thinks it is a sin.

Don't miss this. Two people can do the same action (eat meat), for one it's not a sin, while for the other it is a sin.

Q: What makes the difference?

E.g.--

2. *If my example causes my weak brother to violate his conscience, I've sinned against Christ (12).*

Read v 12. This is serious business...

Let's take a closer look at Paul's description of the "weak" and "strong" Christians...

A "Weak" Christian:

--He has a weak conscience.

--He associates meat with the past, not with the truth.

A "Strong" Christian:

--He understands his freedom.

--He refuses to use his freedom if it will hinder a weaker brother.

--He gives up rights out of love for his brother, but ultimately out of love for Christ.

3. *I must never do anything that would cause my weak brother to fall (13).*

The Greek verb for "fall" ("offend" in the KJV) is *skandalizo*. It means: "to put a stumbling block or impediment in the way, upon which another may trip and fall, metaphorically to offend"¹

Warning: These verses are often used, out of context in my estimation, in the following ways....

E.g.—"I don't think you should have a television. Good Christians don't have televisions. It's a tool of the devil. I've been a Christian for 30 years and haven't had one. What you are doing offends me. You need to do what 1 Corinthians 8 says."

There certainly are great, potential dangers with television, but what's wrong with this person's use of 1 Corinthians 8? How does it not "fit" the situation Paul had in mind?

Consider this, "As a final note to this chapter it should be understood that Paul did not say that a knowledgeable Christian must abandon his freedom to the ignorant prejudice of a "spiritual" bigot. The "weak brother" (v. 11) was one who followed the example of another Christian, not one who carped and coerced that knowledgeable Christian into a particular behavioral pattern. Also it was unlikely that Paul saw this weak brother as permanently shackling the freedom of the knowledgeable Christian. The "weak brother" was no omnipresent phantom but an individual who was to be taught so that he too could enjoy his freedom (Gal. 5:1)."²

Think about what we've learned:

1. What do we learn about *spiritual maturity* from this chapter?
2. What do we learn about *love* from this chapter?

¹*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

²Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.