

God saves sinners. God saves *sinners*. He rescues people out of the terrible situation of rebellion and reconciles them to Himself. It's a wonderful thing to behold.

But when a sinner is converted, his past doesn't disappear. He may continue to struggle with challenges relating to his past. There are certainly answers, but the challenge remains.

For instance, here was 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.

Then God opened their eyes to their need of Christ, and 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? Say, for instance, they went to an unsaved friend's house who happened to be serving steak. "Where'd you get this meat?" they asked. And the friend said, "Oh, they've got a great sale going on down at Aphrodite's temple. I got these filets for a dollar a piece. Best meat in town!"

What should they do? Eat it. And there were dozens of other scenarios like this one that faced the believers, many having to do with this matter of meat offered 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.

One commentary explains, "Ordinarily the Greeks and Romans burned the less desirable portions of an animal in the course of their sacrifices and retained the choicer parts for personal consumption at banquets celebrating the sacrifices. If a sacrifice were made in connection with a state function, the meat which remained was frequently sold in the marketplace. The Corinthians' questions apparently concerned (a) the acceptability of buying and eating meat from one of these sacrificial animals; (b) the acceptability of eating this meat as an invited guest in a friend's home; (c) the acceptability of attending one of these pagan sacrifices and enjoying the meal of celebration which followed in the temple precincts. Paul spoke to each of these issues."<sup>1</sup>

In 8:1 Paul moves to another problem facing the Corinthian church (the last issue was the one in chapter 7). "Now about food sacrifices to idols." In dealing with the problem, Paul first gives some general observations, then some specific counsel...

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

Three observations...

Q: What did Paul say we possess as Christians?

#### **A. We have knowledge (1a).**

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<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

READ v 1a.

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

Q: What are some things you came to know when you became a Christian that you didn't know before?

But when you became a Christian, did you learn all at once everything there is to know about the Christian life? No. 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. On the part of the new believers, as well as those who've known Christ longer.

Discuss: Why so?

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

READ v 1b.

1. *Knowledge can become self-focused.*

Q: How so? What happens to people after they've had truth awhile?

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

It "builds up." It "edifies."

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

READ verses 2-3. Notice what's true of knowledge and love...

1. *Knowledge is limited (2).*

Q: In what sense according to v 2?

2. *Love is commended (3).*

Q: What's Paul's point in v 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.*

Discuss: What happens when people who are at different levels of knowledge *love* each other?

Next, in v 4 Paul begins to address the specific matter of eating food...

## 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 dealing with any problem we need to affirm biblical truth. What does God think about a subject? What has God said about that subject in His Word? In this first 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).*

Two things...

- An idol is nothing.
  - There is one true God.
2. *We know the truth about the Father (6a).*
    - All things came from Him.  
He is the designer of creation and redemption.
    - We are to live for Him.
  3. *We know the truth about the Lord Jesus (6b).*
    - All things came through Him.  
The Father designed creation and redemption. The Son accomplished what the Father designed.
    - We are to live through Him.  
Discuss: Why, in dealing with this controversy, does Paul begin by affirming the truth about these three subjects?

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

Q: Who does Paul have in mind? The younger believers

Q: Why don't they know the truth yet? They haven't had time!

1. *They have wrong ideas about idols (7).*

Q: What kind of ideas, according to v 7?

- Idols are real.
- Food offered to idols is defiled.

2. *They need to learn the truth (8).*

Read v 8. The young believers in Corinth needed to learn two truths...

- Spirituality isn't linked to what you eat.
- Food itself is neutral.

Q: What do we mean by "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...

**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"<sup>2</sup>

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)."<sup>3</sup>

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?

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<sup>2</sup>*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.