

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13
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1 Corinthians 8:1-3. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up

1. Now concerning things sacrificed to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2. But if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he doesn't yet know as he ought to know. 3. But if anyone loves God, the same is known by him.

1a. Now concerning things sacrificed to idols

I chose to skip chapter 5, 6 and 7, and it was in chapter 7 that Paul addressed questions that the Corinthian Christians had asked about marriage (7:1). Now he turns to another of their concerns... food that has been sacrificed to idols.

1b. We know that we all have knowledge

Paul quotes back to the Corinthian Christians something they apparently said in their letter to him—"we all have knowledge."

The Christians appear to recognize that

- idols are not real gods
- food sacrificed to idols has no religious significance
- so they should be able to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols.

During this study, I have pointed out that Corinth is a Greek city, and the Greeks prize philosophy. The word is from two Greek words, philos (love) and sophos (wisdom). The Greeks pride themselves on their wisdom—their knowledge—their sophistication. When they say that "we all have knowledge," they aren't talking about all people. They are talking about themselves.

Any thoughts on this revelation from the people in Corinth?

1c. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up

Paul takes a cheap shot at the Greeks about the statement, "we all have knowledge."

- knowledge in the service of others can be good,
- people who use their knowledge to establish their superiority over other people cannot expect to experience a good result.
- the implications is they likely have an inflated opinion of themselves that helps no one.

Paul used the word *physioi* (often translated "puffed up, or arrogant") in this letter (4:6,18,19; 5:2). Paul obviously thinks that being puffed up—inflated with pride—is a problem for the Corinthian Christians.

2. But if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought to know

What Paul is talking about here is presumptuous knowledge—arrogant knowledge—conceited knowledge. So a person who:

- presumes to have knowledge isn't likely to have it
- assumes he/she knows the facts makes one unwilling to learn anything further
- has a little bit of knowledge may become a barrier to true knowledge.

This commentary from Paul's writing can be described in Education Terms. I decided to begin with the word "Sophomore" for purposes of our discussion today.

- Two Greek words, *sophos*, which means wise, and *moros*, which means foolish. The word *sophomore*, then, literally means "wise fool." It alludes to the fact that a sophomore is far enough along in the educational process that he/she is likely to know just enough to be dangerous, and just enough not to want to learn more.
- I think the best substitute for being wise is being sixteen.

Paul clearly isn't impressed with the knowledge of these Corinthian Christians.

- He tells them that the conceitedly knowledgeable person isn't likely to be truly knowledgeable.
- He is setting the stage to say something important.

3. But if anyone loves God, the same is known by him

This seems like an odd verse to me. After saying that a person who thinks he knows everything probably doesn't, I would expect Paul to say, "the truly wise person is the one who knows God." Instead, he says, "if anyone loves God, the same is known by him."

Paul shifts the emphasis from knowing to loving.

The key to the Christian life

- isn't knowing all the answers.
- is loving God.
- knowing that the person who loves God will be known by God.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6. No idol is anything

4. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5. For though there are things that are called "gods," whether in the heavens or on earth; as there are many "gods" and many "lords;" 6. yet to 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 we live through him.

4. Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no other God but one

In this verse, Paul quotes Corinthian Christians who have said,

- “no idol is anything in the world”
- “there is no other God but one.”
 - That last quotation alludes to the Shema, which says, “Hear, Israel: Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4).
 - Jewish people recite the Shema in the morning and evening.

For fun, do you own research on Shema Yisrael Perhaps you will share your findings with the class.??..

5. For though there are things that are called ‘gods,’ whether in the heavens or on earth as there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’

While Paul agrees that the gods behind the idols are not real objectively, they seem real to those who worship them—and thus they have a subjective reality that the Christian must take into account.

6. yet to 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 we live through him

For many Greeks, there might be many “gods” and “lords” (v. 5), for Christians there is only “one God, the Father” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 8:7-8. Not everyone understands that

7. However, that knowledge isn’t in all men. But some, with consciousness of the idol until now, eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8. But food will not commend us to God. For neither, if we don’t eat, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better.

7a. However, that knowledge isn’t in all men

Reread verse 1, where Paul quotes the Corinthian Christians as saying, “we all have knowledge.” The knowledge that they claimed was

- no objective reality behind the idols to whom people are making sacrifices
- no religious significance to meat that has been sacrificed to idols.

Now Paul directly contests their claim that “all of us possess knowledge that is not true.”

7b. But some, with consciousness of the idol until now, eat as of a thing sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled

Many neophyte Christians, think of idols as god, and of meat that has been sacrificed to idols as sacred. While this might not be true, their beliefs color how they perceive the world.

- If they were to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols, that would become, in their minds, a sacred meal—and would draw them toward idol-worship and away from Christ.
- If they saw Christian leaders eating meat sacrificed to idols within the temple confines, they would see that as an endorsement of idol worship.

What do you think about Christians’ need to take the sensibilities of these new Christians into account?

8. But food will not commend us to God. For neither, if we don't eat, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better

Paul once again quotes what the Corinthian Christians have said to him, "But food will not commend us to God" concluding with... "For neither, if we don't eat, are we the worse; not, if we eat, are we the better."

I think if these chic Christians were living in isolation, they could be correct, if..

- there were no possibility of their actions being misinterpreted
- there were no possibility that their example might lead a weaker person astray
- then, for the most part, there would be no problem with their eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Your thoughts on this TMc observation: I see a problem here that Paul doesn't address. Christians eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols are shopping at an idolatrous business.

1 Corinthians 8:9-13. Be careful not to become a stumbling block

9. But be careful that by no means does this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak. 10. For if a man sees you who have knowledge sitting in an idol's temple, won't his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11. And through your knowledge, he who is weak perishes, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 12. Thus, sinning against the brothers, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will eat no meat forevermore, that I don't cause my brother to stumble.

9. But be careful that by no means does this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak

The Greek word for "liberty" is usually translated "power" or "authority." It is translated "liberty" in this verse because of the context.

The idea of a stumbling block goes back to Jewish law. "You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind; but you shall fear your God. I am Yahweh" (Leviticus 19:14).

Paul establishes the principle that Christians have a responsibility to take into account the sensibilities of those who might otherwise be misled by their behavior.

Does any of this sound like some of the actions occurring in churches today?

10. For if a man sees you who have knowledge sitting in an idol's temple, won't his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

The problem that Paul identifies in this verse is that those new Christians who are weak,

- see Christians eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols
- see them eating in the temple precincts

might misinterpret that behavior and be upset spiritually

- they might decide that it is permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols
- might do it even though they think of the meat as having spiritual significance

- they might interpret the action of the Christian leaders as hypocritical and decide that they want nothing further to do with the church.

Do Christians today do things that might make people think they are hypocritical?

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

A literal translation of this verse would read, “Then the weak person, the brother for whom Christ died, is ruined by your knowledge.” It suggests four observations:

- First, there are weak Christians who might misunderstand if they saw Christians eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols.
- Second, these Christians are brothers and sister we should love.
- Third, Christ died for these and all people.
- Fourth, our behavior has the potential to derail the faith of these weak Christians if they misunderstand what we are doing.

Earlier, Paul said that “knowledge puffs up” (v. 1). Now he says that knowledge has the power to destroy when deployed without consideration for the sensibilities of the other person.

12. Thus, sinning against the brothers, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ

Paul establishes a linkage between our sin and Christ. If we exercise our Christian freedom in ways that might endanger the faith of our Christian brothers and sisters, we sin against Christ.

13. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will eat no meat forevermore, that I don’t cause my brother to stumble

Paul concludes this chapter by stating the principle that he personally observes to insure that no one is injured by his actions. If someone could misinterpret his actions and be injured spiritually, Paul will refrain from the action even though he would then be free to act.

My observation:

- He doesn’t need a rule book to restrict his behavior.
- He takes responsibility to restrict his own freedom when exercising his freedom might injure another person.
- He implies that these Corinthian Christians should follow his example.

I like that about Paul.

Next week in chapter 9, he will talk about ways that he voluntarily restricts his personal freedoms for the sake of Christ.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the lord make his face to shine on you
and be gracious to you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

