

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 "Love Before Liberty"

Confusion & controversy are the topics of the hour. In Ch 7 Paul dealt with Corinthian *confusion*. Questions concerning marriage/singleness & serving the Lord. In Ch 8 we begin leaning into Corinthian *controversy*. There was some tension concerning the topic of eating meat offered to idols. *Is that something a Christian could do, or should do?* – Obviously, for you & me (culturally) this really isn't something that applies to us. However, the *principle* in play regarding Christian *liberty* very much does. For instance, people have questions about Christians & movies, or television, or smoking, or drinking or dancing... Things that the bible may not layout in black & white. They linger in "the gray" & so people volley back & forth as to what's the appropriate response of the believer regarding these kinds of things. It's in Ch 8 that Paul outlines the principle that should guide/govern our lives when it comes to questionable things.

At the bottom line is this: The basis for our rationale when it comes to deciding what we're willing to do or not do (in areas of which scripture doesn't directly address) should never be *knowledge*, it should always be *love*. We're to consider the impact & the effect of how our actions might influence, encourage or wound other believers around us.

But to set the scene for you, things were obviously very different in the ancient Grecian world than they are for us today. Pagan temples & idolatry were commonplace if not prevalent throughout their cities. & Often, connected to a temple would be a meat market or even a restaurant of sorts... **Now, you may be thinking, "What in the world does a meat market or restaurant have to do w/a temple?" It's like this. Envision multiplied sacrifices taking place in each temple to each "god" everyday... You know, some pagan brings a lamb, or a bull to sacrifice to Zeus, so the priest would offer the sacrifice. Part of it would be burned on the altar, the best cuts would go to the priest & the rest would be returned to the one offering the sacrifice for his family to feast on.**

If you're the priest, once you've sacrificed a couple of animals, you've got more than you & your family can eat, but people are still bringing animals in all day... So what do you do? You put the overstock (again, generally the best cuts, the filet minion, the K.C. strips or whatever) in the temple meat market at a discounted price...

People then weren't much different than we are today. Everyone is looking for a discount, or a bargain... So as a believer, if I can go to "Mighty Aphrodite's discount meat market" & buy grade "A" stock for less than I can buy it in the regular market... Is that ok? Some were saying, "Absolutely! Idols are nothing anyway!"

Others were saying, “Hey, I’m not sure. Isn’t that like supporting idolatry or maybe engaging in it somehow peripherally? It doesn’t feel right to me...” So they present the question to Paul. Here in Ch’s 8-10 he addresses this basic principle of Christian liberty.

Vs 1-3

“Now concerning things offered to idols:” Paul is going to get down to the nitty gritty regarding eating the sacrifice that’s been offered to an idol. But before he does, he digs beneath the surface to uncover the underlying issues. It’s really not a matter of what I can or can’t do. (He tackled this back in Ch 6. Perhaps you remember these words, “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful.*”¹) Which is to say, “You can do what you want. The question to consider is, ‘How is this going to impact my relationship w/God?’ Will it build you up or tear you down? Will it edify & promote spiritual growth or will it bring you into bondage?” Just because you *can* do something, doesn’t mean you necessarily *should*. How will it effect my relationship w/God? – But it’s really not an issue of “being able to”.

It’s a matter of knowledge (leading to liberty) & love (leading to compassion toward others). Think of it like this. When I’m considering some course of action, the 1st question to consider is, “How does this express my love for God?” Or “Will this be *beneficial* or *detrimental* to my relationship w/God?” The 2nd question is, “How will this express my love for my brothers/sisters in the body of Christ?” Or “How will this impact/influence others?” Love toward God, love toward others... Do you see where this is going?

The goal of the Christian life really isn’t *knowledge* (though we should never negate or somehow invalidate the study of God’s word; hopefully that’s a given), the goal is *love*.

“*Knowledge* puffs up, but *love* edifies.” Notice that both (knowledge & love) will have an impact upon our lives. But they’re vastly different (yet they *need* each other). Knowledge *puffs up*, but love *builds up*. It’s the difference between a bubble & a building. Knowledge, in & of itself, typically leads to a sense of superiority, there’s a prideful tendency that comes w/knowledge. – Now that’s not to say that biblical knowledge is a bad thing (necessarily). We *need* to know & understand the word of God... But if knowledge alone is the pursuit of my life, it will more than likely impact me negatively. I’ll feel like a “know it all”, I’ll be a little more harsh & insensitive toward others. Wonder why they’re so lazy in their study of the word...

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [1 Co 6:12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Of course the bitter irony to all of that is the fact that a “know it all” attitude is only evidence of ignorance. The person who really *knows* the truth is all the more aware of how much more there is that he/she *doesn't know*.

The next time you get to feeling pretty smart, just turn on over to Job 38-39 & try & take on the over 70 questions that God asked Job & see how many you can tackle. Up to that point Job was questioning God. It got to the point where God said, “Ok, you wanna go down this road, now prepare yourself like a man; I will question *you* & you will answer *Me*.” It’s common for us to feel like we have a right to question God; but what if God has a few questions for us? Suddenly we realize, we’re not quite as “together” in our understanding as we thought we were.

Solomon, the wisest man (outside of Christ) who ever lived said this, *“As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.”*²

We read in the book of Isaiah, *“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!”*³ Or in the NT vernacular, *“Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.”*⁴

& Again, it’s not that knowledge is irrelevant. There is a knowledge that is perhaps more important than anything other thing... & That is the knowledge that *God has* of those who *love Him*. In other words, having a relationship *w/God* is immeasurably better than knowing all *about* God... How tragic to make a life goal of knowing all about God & never actually coming to *know God personally*. To hear those terrifying words the day you stand before Christ, *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”*⁵

This is why week after month after year I stand here & offer the opportunity for people surrender their life to Christ. Because I’m counting on you guys bringing people, or the Lord moving upon people’s hearts to be here so that they can hear the gospel & make a conscious decision for or against Him... Knowing God & being known *by* God is the most important/pivotal moment in the eternal existence of a person’s life...

& Once a person comes to know the Lord, or rather known *by* the Lord. What’s the fruit of that encounter? ... Love. The fruit of the Spirit is love...

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ec 11:5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 5:21]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 12:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 7:23]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Knowledge & love temper one another. The problem here was that the strong believers in Corinth had knowledge, but it wasn't being balanced by love.

So, "Yes", be students of God's word. Grow in your knowledge of the Lord, but make sure your love for God has priority, that intimacy w/Jesus has the primacy.

Vs 4-6

From a technical/factual perspective, Paul says, "You're right, an idol is nothing. There is no other God. & Whatever they're worshipping as 'gods' we know that truthfully there is only one God, the Father (*of whom* are all things & we for Him;) & one Lord J.C. (*through whom* are all things & through whom we live.)"

So, if you're wondering about the meat, it's not affected, it's not polluted, it's just a piece of meat (& it's prime meat at that). Therefore, to the Christian who understands that, go ahead, eat it, enjoy it, it's not a problem.

You get the idea, right? If someone offered a sacrifice to Mercury, it's no big deal to buy the leftover meat, because Mercury isn't a "god" anyway. There's only one God. & That's really what I want to highlight here in this section. "There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things..." The bible speaks w/resounding clarity on this issue. There is *One God*. Isaiah 37, "*O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.*"⁶ "One God... of whom are all things." That is, He is the source, the wellspring of all things. In the beginning *God created* the heavens & the earth... He didn't set a big bang in motion, evolution is a fallacy, *all things* are of God. Again, Isaiah 44, "*Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.*"⁷

One God... & One Lord J.C. *through whom* are all things... & through whom we live. Now don't be confused here. Paul isn't distinguishing Jesus from God, as though Jesus weren't God. When he calls Him "Lord", he uses the Greek word "Kurios" which speaks to the Sovereign Master of the inhabited world & the Sovereign Master over all the universe. Now; you can't be the Lord of hosts, the Sovereign over all creation if you're not God... You can't say "*of whom* are all things" or "*through whom* are all things" of anyone other than God.

He's highlighting the source & agent of creation... God is the Creator & all things were created through J.C.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 37:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 44:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The apostle John (in reference to Jesus) said it like this, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."⁸ Paul reiterated it like this, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."⁹ For in Him we live & move & have our being.

Now, this isn't really a study on the Triune nature of God (1 God, 3 Persons). & Truth be told, chasing those thoughts will leave your brain hurting. God never asked me to understand everything He told me, He asked me to believe everything He told me; & *that* I can do.

So; idols *are* nothing, that must mean buying my meat at a temple market must *mean* nothing, so that's what I'm gonna do... That's kind of how some of the Corinthians were thinking... Only 1 problem w/that however...

Vs 7

The problem (Paul says) is that not everyone is as mature in their knowledge or understanding of spiritual truths. Everyone is at a different place in their walk & relationship w/God. So, you're enjoying a steak from the temple meat market, no problem (that idol isn't a god, so why do you care). But for the less mature believer, they hear about how great the Aphrodite Avocado Burger is, so they go ahead & eat it & immediately their conscience condemns them! They're thinking, "I can't believe I just gave money to a pagan temple, & I ate that burger offered to an idol... it's like I've worshiped an idol or I've somehow connected myself or identified w/this whole system..." & Now they feel guilty w/in themselves & they're angry w/everyone who recommended the burger to them... ☺

& This is where we enter into the "gray". Because there are some things that we know defile a person. They're plainly pointed out in scripture as sin. Sexual immorality, adultery, drunkenness, covetousness, stealing, drug abuse, selfish ambitions, outbursts of wrath... you get the idea. But there are other areas (as we mentioned in our introduction) that the Bible doesn't really speak to at all. Smoking, "social" drinking, movies, T.V. dancing... Is there liberty in these areas? Can Christians dance? I'm just gonna be honest here, some can... & some can't! ☺

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 1:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Col 1:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But here's the interesting thing about this Vs. The person who needs to avoid the pagan meat market; he's the one that Paul identifies as the *weak* believer. We'd have a tendency to see it the other way. "Man, they're so spiritual, they won't eat that meat, or eat at that place. Look how sensitive they are to these gray areas." Paul says, "No, they're uninformed & immature." They have a "weak" conscience.

Not because their conscience doesn't work! In fact, it *overworks*! It's operating on inaccurate information. They believe there's something to an idol when in fact there's nothing to an idol. It's stone, or wood, or whatever it's made of. Just because it's been fashioned to *look* like something, doesn't make it something. It's still stone... or whatever. & This is why we want to be students of God's word. So that we can know the truth & walk in the freedom w/which Christ has made us free.

But even though it's not sin to eat that burger, or watch a movie or whichever example you want to use, if your conscience isn't at the place where it allows to do that... then it's best to not do that. Again, we're talking about gray areas... If your conscience allows you to get drunk, or be sexually immoral then your conscience is that the bible refers to as "seared". You need to repent & ask God to renew your mind & your heart. But Paul wrote to the Romans regarding this very issue & said, "*Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*"¹⁰

So though the bible may not classify it as sin, it can become sin *to you* if you don't have the freedom w/in yourself to partake of whatever it may be. Someone goes to a movie, you just don't feel right about it. Don't let them talk you into it, just stay home. Keep growing in grace. If they day comes that you want to go, then go. If not, don't worry about it. But Paul is going to put forth the fact that it's really no appropriate for the mature believer to try & pound his point into the less mature. But rather it's incumbent upon the mature believer to walk in love/compassion toward the less mature. Because again, as he wrote to the Romans, "*...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*"¹¹ There are more important matters to tend to outside of choosing what to eat...

Vs 8

He's saying that having the freedom to eat that food, or not, has no bearing on how spiritual you are. You're made righteous through faith in J.C.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 14:22-23] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ro 14:17] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

You don't improve upon that by knowing that an idol is nothing. "You're not better if you eat, or worse if you don't." Put this verse in your heart. Because this is the very point that many Christians stumble upon concerning Christian liberty (movies, music, the occasional beer or whatever). The assumption is that one stance is more spiritual than the other... But whatever liberty you enjoy, Vs 9 is a critical key.

Vs 9-13

What's that? For *you* believer, *love* trumps *liberty*. Allow me to illustrate. Let's say for the sake of argument that you have liberty to drink alcohol (I'm not saying you don't have the right biblically, but as it pertains to your conviction personally, you're ok w/it & you drink "responsibly"). The problem is that you don't know of those in the body who've struggled w/it radically. There are people among you whom God has delivered from the bondage of alcoholism & others who continue to fight it every day...

So there you are at whichever restaurant & you decide some alcoholic beverage sounds nice. So you order it & the waiter brings it out & there it is on your table. But then in walks Joe Christian ex-alcoholic. He sees you, you see him & you all conversate for a minute & all *seems well* but in his mind all he can think about is how good that drink *looks...* So he starts reasoning w/in himself, "Well, if it's ok for them, it must be ok. After all he/she is a strong believer, I look up to them spiritually. I guess I'm being too legalistic, I'll go ahead & have one myself!" & Inadvertently you start him down this slippery sinful slope that destroys his life because you insisted on your liberty. The question is, "Is it worth that to you?"

The answer *should be* a resounding & emphatic, "No". Why? Because not only have you sinned against your brother in emboldening him to do something that is sin to him, but in so doing you've sinned against *Christ*. Remember what Jesus said? "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."¹²

We see this law of love over liberty at work in the life of Christ as well. Look w/me quickly (& we're all but finished) at **Matthew 17** Vs 24-27 (read).

You see? Jesus had the *liberty* to ignore the temple tax, but He chose to walk in *love* for the sake of those around Him who didn't have that knowledge.

So as a mature believer, you will make the decisions regarding what you're willing to do & what you're not willing to do, not based upon liberty, but upon love.

¹² *The New King James Version*, (1982). (Mt 25:45). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's not about rights/knowledge. It's about concern *for* consideration *of* & compassion *toward*... others.

Listen, we might think, "Hey, that's their problem. I'm not going to answer to them, but to God alone." & That's true. But guess what we're going to answer for... (amongst other things)... the way we treated our brothers/sisters. Our concern for them, our compassion & consideration toward them...

Now, we're not talking about bowing to the legalistic pressures of religious elitists. Liberty isn't pinned down by legality. But liberty will be limited by love... I want to bless & build up my brothers/sisters, not stumble or tear them down... Consider one another, let love, not liberty rule in your heart & God will be glorified in your life... Yes, liberty is valuable, but *love* is invaluable.

Prayer Points:

Father we thank You for Your word. We thank You for *Your* love & we ask that You would strengthen us in this understanding. That we would refuse to insist on our liberties & resolve to walk in love. Bless this body of believers, be glorified in our lives.

We spoke of the opportunity give your life to Christ. This is that opportunity. Maybe you came here today & you knew a little *about* God, or maybe a lot about God. But you *don't know Him* nor are you *known by Him*. Jesus shed His blood upon the cross to span that gap, so that your sin might be forgiven & you might be washed clean in the sight of God. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved. For w/the heart one believes unto righteousness & w/the mouth confession is made unto salvation.