

Liberated to Love 1 Corinthians 8

Paul is responding to questions he has received from the Corinthian church about divisions within the congregation.

1 Corinthians 7:1 – *Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”*

1 Corinthians 7:25 – *Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.*

And so, after a lengthy conversation about singleness, marriage, divorce, remarriage, and widowhood, Paul moves onto the clash between liberty and license.

His concern is that the Corinthians live holy lives, demonstrating the power and worth of the gospel:

a) Power – It really can change you

“Imagine turning a tin soldier into a real little man. It would involve turning the tin into flesh. And suppose the tin soldier did not like it. He is not interested in flesh; all he sees is that the tin is being spoilt. He thinks you are killing him. He will do everything he can to prevent you. He will not be made into a man if he can help it”
– CS Lewis, Mere Christianity (Book IV, Chapter 5)

b) Worth – It really is worth it

First: Balance Knowledge with Love 1-3

a) Meat Offered to Idols. 1a

- Jewish Christians coming out of strict dietary laws would certainly have been concerned about this.
- Gentile Christians coming out of pagan temple worship would have been concerned for a different reason.
- Others had no concern at all.

Meat offered on pagan altars was usually divided into four portions:

- One portion burnt in honor of the god
- One portion given to the worshipper to take home and eat
- One portion eaten by the priests
- One portion sold at the local meat market

The meat offered to idols was usually cheaper because it wasn't the best portion.

This raises the question: "Can we eat meat that was offered to idols?"

b) The Real Question. 1b-c

1 - We all have knowledge – Paul doesn't deny or criticize their knowledge.

1 Corinthians 1:4-6 - *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge*

But he also knows that "We could discuss this all day long and never reach a consensus."

2 - This is because "knowledge puffs up."

3 - How might "love" fit into this equation?

IMP: Both knowledge and love are the soil for something:

- Love puffs = *physio* = *to inflate, be proud*
- Love builds = *oikodomeo* = *to promote, rebuild or repair*

It's the difference between a bubble and a building. Some virtues simply cause us to swell. Others actually make us grow!

c) The Real Problem. 2-3

1 - We don't know what we think we know

If education teaches us anything, it teaches us how little we know.

2 - We don't love like we think we love

Here is the real question: Would you rather know something or be known by God?

What is the greatest commandment?

Matthew 22:35-37 - *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*

Yes, we love God with our minds by knowing God and knowing about God. You can't love what you don't know and the more you know God, the more you will love him. But the end of knowledge isn't knowing but love.

The more you know of God, the more you will love him. No matter what we claim, if we don't love God, we don't know him.

Second: Balance Doctrine with Patience. 4-7

a) The Reality 4-6

1 - An idol is nothing – *“an idol has no real existence”*

Now, what it does to the heart is another thing and that is something that Paul isn't addressing. But the fact of the matter is that this meat offered to idols is exactly like meat not offered to idols because idols don't exist. Offering it to nothing means nothing as far as the meat is concerned.

2 - There are no other Gods – *“there is no God but one”*

These gods have images, but the images represent nothing. So the meat offered to Zeus, Poseidon, Diana or Aphrodite is meat offered to nothing.

3 - All other gods are pretend - 5

4 - Our God made everything – 6

“Lord” = kurios = master but in the OT, it's the way we translate, “Yahweh” – “I am Who I Am”
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John 17:22 - The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.

**Glory creates unity.
Unity is derived from glory.
Division is all about us.
Unity is all about God.**

The fundamental problem with the Corinthian church is that they know each other and love themselves instead of knowing and loving God.

It would be nice if that ‘knowledge’ solved the problem, but it doesn't. Many of the Corinthians did believe in these gods before they became Christians, and they are concerned about the influence of meat offered to these idols

b) The Concern. 7

1 - The Corinthians are in different places in their Christian walk 7

The Corinthians who are eating meat offered to idols are right to do so. They have the knowledge that idols are not real gods.

But, they must understand that not everyone in the Corinthian church is at that place yet and if they eat it, their consciences are defiled

IMP: A defiled conscience is an incorrectly informed conscience.

But, you can imagine some of the 'free' Corinthians saying, "Yes, we're right!" Yet, Paul says, you can be right and incorrect.

- 2 - You aren't more spiritual if you eat meat offered to idols. 8a
- 3 - And you are no less spiritual if you don't. 8b

For Paul, a converted Jew, to make this argument demonstrates his own personal growth. Much of the Mosaic law centered on dietary restrictions. Paul and Peter had an argument about this in Galatians (2:11-14).

I Corinthians 1:2 - To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus...

Third: Balance Liberty with Sensitivity. 9-11

a) The real issue

- 1 - Liberties should never be employed if they are a stumbling block to others 9

Remember, Paul is only using the word, 'weak' here in connection with knowledge. These 'weak' brothers and sisters haven't grown into this knowledge yet.

- 2 - Our liberties should not encourage others to violate their consciences. 10
- 3 - Our liberties should not harm another brother or sister 11

b) It's not a matter of 'can' but 'should.'

Fourth: Balance Maturity with Restraint. 12-13

- a) It is really about loving Jesus more than ourselves or others – 12
- b) It's about following Jesus in the surrender of our lives -13

In the end, this isn't just a matter of food, is it?

1 Corinthians 6:12-13 - *All things are lawful for me,*" but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other

It's any liberty we have that truly offends a brother or sister. In response, we love Jesus and the brother or sister enough not to engage in that liberty in a way that offends their conscience.

Conclusion: Paul has challenged us to do four things:

- 1 - Balance knowledge and love – 1-3
- 2 - Balance doctrine and patience – 4-7
- 3 - Balance liberty with sensitivity – 8-11
- 4 - Balance maturity with restraint – 12-13

All of this is possible because the cross frees us from the tyranny of both licentiousness and legalism. Paul rejects both extremes.

He isn't giving weaker, offended brothers and sisters a trump card to play every time they don't like something. We can hardly be unknowledgeable or weaker after following Christ for years.

Nor is Paul protecting the feelings of immature believers.

He wants both groups to grow up in Christ.

Because it is the cross of Jesus that liberates us to love, to love biblically. To love biblically is to love appropriately, healthily, and best for everyone, the lover and the loved.