

First Corinthians 8

Introduction:

1. As in the other chapters of this epistle, we trust the Holy Spirit to introduce subjects that will be profitable for our souls.
2. It is our goal to understand all verses of this chapter dealing with an unfamiliar subject, and then apply them prudently.
3. Christian liberty in matters indifferent, or things allowed by God, is dealt with extensively in Romans 14, I Cor 8 and 10.

Outline of Chapter 8:

1. Knowledge without love is dangerous (1-3)
2. Knowing the true God condemns idols (4-6)
3. Weak brethren deserve special care (7-13)

- 8:1 **Paul began his consideration of meat offered to idols by contrasting knowledge and charity.**
- A. The opening words of this chapter indicate Corinth also had questions on this subject (7:1).
 - B. Corinth was a pagan city, where meat offered to idols was sold in markets and eaten in feasts.
 1. Like Jewish sacrifices, animals would be offered, killed, and then partly eaten or sold.
 2. Animals were killed before the idol, part burned on the altar, and the remaining parts given to the priest and/or the worshipper to eat in a feast or sell in the market (shambles).
 3. Therefore, there was meat available at temple feasts, home feasts, and in the marketplace.
 4. It is informative how the devil apes the worship of Jehovah by copying blood sacrifices!
 5. The sacrifices also included wine or other things for offerings (Rom 14:21; I Cor 10:21).
 6. Paul will give permission in another chapter to buy offered meat at market (I Cor 10:25).
 7. Paul will give permission in another chapter to attend the feasts of pagans (I Cor 10:27).
 - C. A conflict existed between those with weak consciences and those with strong consciences.
 1. Those with no regard for idols due to never having bought the lie or resenting their wasted lives in idolatry might boldly think of eating such offered meat in any situation.
 2. Those with strong memories of idol worship or strong Jewish resentment of idolatry might have great doubts about eating meat that had been offered to an idol.
 3. There is also a temperamental difference that makes some men quite insensitive to others.
 4. The factors affecting consciences are instruction, experience, and the providence of God.
 5. Those without regard for idols considered their knowledge superior to weak brothers; and it was superior in the limited sense of knowing the idol was a block of wood or stone.
 6. Paul agreed, briefly, with those of great knowledge that the subject was a simple matter, though he will shortly admit that not all the members at Corinth had that knowledge (7).
 7. Paul connected with the haughty crowd of knowledgeable saints before correcting them.
 - D. Paul then corrected the haughty knowledge of some at Corinth with a rebuke from charity.
 1. Here is his first of three gentle and wise rebukes of some members for their "knowledge."
 2. Haughty knowledge, unrestrained by consideration of others, puffs men up with pride.
 3. True knowledge, which is godly wisdom and understanding of truth, will not cause pride.
 4. Knowledge not ruled causes a puffed up, arrogant, and haughty attitude toward others.
 5. It is self-evident that being on the strong side of a matter of liberty tends toward pride.
 6. Charity is the attitude and action toward others esteeming them most important (Phil 2:3).
 7. Charity is the attitude and action always seeking the edification and welfare of others.
 8. Charity is superior to knowledge in this situation, for it sacrifices preferences for others.
 9. He will tell them shortly that knowledge without charity makes them nothing (13:2).
 - E. True knowledge and love are very compatible (Phil 1:9-11), as Paul proved (II Cor 12:15).
 - F. Dogmatic knowledge is appropriate in matters of truth, but not in these matters of liberty.
 1. Paul never told anyone to show mercy toward those in error (Rom 16:17-18; Gal 1:8-9).
 2. True charity in matters of truth before God will rebuke error (Lev 19:17; I Thess 5:14).

- 8:2 **The puffed up members did not truly have knowledge worth such high and lofty thoughts.**
- A. Paul addressed the arrogant Corinthians who disdained any problem with sacrificed meat, for they gloated in their superior knowledge of idols to presumptuously eat even in idol temples!
 - B. Having gently rebuked their error by comparing knowledge to charity in the first verse, Paul now rebukes them further by reminding them they were all operating with partial knowledge.
 - C. This statement is true in general, but Paul is using it to humble the arrogant ones at Corinth.
 - D. He will tell them in a few chapters that they only saw things through a glass darkly (13:12).
 - E. How could these proud saints be superior to Paul, who had not yet attained (Phil 3:8-14)?
 - F. It is our duty to avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom 12:3).
 - G. Thinking you are something, when nothing, is lying to yourself and believing it (Gal 6:3)!
 - H. It is our duty to examine ourselves and seek further knowledge (Job 34:31-32; Ps 139:23-24).
- 8:3 **The most precious knowledge in the earth is God's knowledge of us, known by loving God.**
- A. If a man loves God, he shows the evidence that he is affectionately known by God Himself.
 - B. We understand Paul to obviously mean more than God's bare awareness of such men, for it is common in Scripture for "know" to mean affection (Gen 4:1; Amos 3:2; Matt 7:23).
 - C. For the true axiom of grace is simple: we love Him, because He first loved us (I John 4:19).
 - D. The voice of a verb can be sweet: God knowing us is better than us knowing God (Gal 4:9)!
 - E. The subtle lesson condemns gloating in our knowledge; we should rather seek His approval.
 - F. Here is Paul's third gentle rebuke – God knowing us is far greater than us knowing things.
 - G. The most important matter of life is not eating meat but rather securing God's full approval.
 - H. Many in the last day shall boast of their knowledge, but they shall be rejected (Matt 7:21-23).
 - I. Therefore, it behooves us to love God supremely, so as to prove His loving acceptance of us.
 - J. The corollary of loving God is simple: we will also love His children (I John 4:20 – 5:2).
- 8:4 **Christian saints can easily recognize that an idol and things related to it are utterly vain.**
- A. After his introductory three-part rebuke (1-3), Paul returned to things offered to idols.
 - B. It is a general fact of Christian converts that they know former gods were not gods at all.
 - C. It is a general fact of Christian converts that they confess the only God and Father of Jesus.
 - D. The gods of the heathen are ridiculous imaginations of depraved minds, and there is only true God (Ps 115:1-8; 135:15-18; Is 44:9-20; Jer 10:7-10; Jonah 2:8; Hab 2:18-19; Rom 1:21-23).
 - E. Our blessed God looked for other gods, but He could not find any (Is 44:6,8; 45:21; 46:9).
 - F. Paul in this verse, as in the first verse, agreed with the knowledge of the strong Corinthians, for he is about to state that not all the Corinthians had the same confident knowledge (7).
 - G. Though Paul agreed with the strong Corinthians, the whole chapter is warning them of sin.
- 8:5 **Pagans have no end to their imagination for making up gods and lords in heaven and earth.**
- A. Since man defied his Creator God, he has sought the invention of many other gods (Ec 7:29).
 - B. These are all so-called gods, because there is only one living and true God (I Thess 1:9-10).
 - C. Men have worshipped the heavenly bodies, and they have worshipped many things on earth.
 1. God condemned the worship of heavenly bodies (Deut 4:19; Job 31:26-28; Eze 8:15-18).
 2. God condemned the worship of things on earth (Ex 20:3-6; 32:8; Lev 26:1; II Chr 33:7).
 3. Paul described images made after man, birds, beasts, and creeping things (Romans 1:23).
 4. The Ephesians thought they had a great god, Diana; but she was nothing (Acts 19:23-34).
 5. Greeks, Romans, and others had deities residing in heaven and others residing on earth.
 6. Remember Rome's Pantheon and many Greek gods – and these were civilized thinkers!
 - D. Our blessed God ridicules the idea of making an idol from leftover wood (Isaiah 44:9-20).
 - E. Allah of the Muslims is none other than the moon god of the Arabians. Think crescent moon!
 - F. Do not forget that this logic also applies to many false Christs (Matt 24:24 cp II Cor 11:3-4).

- 8:6 **Paul declared in one glorious sentence the truth of our great Father God and Jesus Christ.**
- A. In contrast to the Pantheon of pagan gods, there is but one God for worshippers of Jehovah.
 - B. We have our own religion, and it has precisely one God and one Saviour (I Thess 1:9-10).
 - 1. We reject every other god as a ridiculous perversion; and the makers and worshippers of those gods are to be considered just as ignorant (Psalm 115:8; 135:18; Isaiah 44:9-20).
 - 2. There is absolutely no room for thinking we worship the same god under different names!
 - 3. We reject any compromise whatsoever to either of these magnificent aspects of the truth.
 - C. From beginning to end of Scripture, believers are taught to be strict monotheists of Jehovah.
 - 1. Moses commanded Israel to worship the one and only God, the LORD Jehovah (De 6:4).
 - 2. All things in heaven and earth obtained their origin from Him alone (Exodus 20:11).
 - 3. We are in Him in a legal and vital union too wonderful to know (John 10:29; Eph 1:23).
 - 4. Our religion unites us inseparably to God our Father (I Thess 1:1; II Thess 1:1).
 - D. There is only one Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and men, of our salvation.
 - 1. Jesus was executor of creation by being the Word of God (John 1:3; Eph 3:9; Heb 1:2).
 - 2. Jesus is our Savior, legally and vitally, by His death and regeneration (John 5:25; 10:11).
 - 3. All that we have and are spiritually is by the purchase price and work of Jesus Christ.
 - 4. As condemnation and death is by Adam; justification and life is by Christ (Rom 5:12-19).
 - E. This is our religion – absolute confidence in Jehovah and His Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
 - F. We reject all other religions as satanic delusions of depraved minds (I Cor 10:20; Jude 1:3).
 - G. Paul allowed no room for Allah, Mohammed, Mary, or any other invention of deity by men.

- 8:7 **There were weak believers in Corinth that still had conscience problems with the idols.**
- A. Though they were baptized converts, they were still offended to eat meat offered to idols.
 - B. They knew the true God and Jesus Christ, but they were still bothered by idolatrous religion.
 - C. Eating offered meat violated their conscience, for they viewed it as compromising their faith.
 - D. From their weak perspective, they could not understand how a believer in God could do it.
 - E. They did not have the total defiant rejection of idols and idolatry as nothing but imaginations.
 - F. They still had superstitious opinions and feelings about the idol that made them leery of it.
 - G. By eating against their conscience, they sinned, grieving the Spirit and leading to other sins.
 - H. A weak conscience is generally the result of poor teaching, but it can also be the product of zeal for the Lord or a special dispensation from God for a man to be conscious of holiness.

- 8:8 **The blessed God does not measure men by their use or neglect of matters of liberty.**
- A. No matter what position a man took on this subject of meat, God did not care either way.
 - B. Therefore, Paul clearly sets this forth as one of those “matters of liberty,” where men choose and they are neither the better nor the worse in the sight of God for their choice.
 - C. Let each strong man and each weak man consider this text – their choice is not praiseworthy!
 - D. There is no reason for any party to despise another, because God does not care (Rom 14:3)!
 - E. Yet how often men flatter themselves for their supposed superior position in a liberty!

- 8:9 **Matters of liberty should be used very carefully to avoid causing weak brethren to stumble.**
- A. Here is one of the places we find the word “liberty” applied to things indifferent to God.
 - B. A “matter of liberty” is a thing or activity that God has neither commanded nor prohibited, which leaves it up to the choice of each individual believer, within the restraints of charity.
 - C. True saints will take heed, or be carefully cautious, lest by any means they offend believers.
 - D. God did not care what they did regarding meat, but the other man’s conscience condemned it.
 - E. A stumblingblock is something in the way that causes a person to trip or fall morally, to sin.
 - F. A weak person is prone to sin in a given area, which means the strong must be very cautious.

- G. Of course, there is an evil spirit that causes the strong to despise and ignore weak brethren.
- H. It is clear from Paul calling eating meat a matter of liberty here that Acts 15 had limitations.
 1. The council at Jerusalem had decreed against eating meat offered to idols (Acts 15:29).
 2. The decree was against a certain heresy and limited geographically (Acts 15:23,41; 16:4).
 3. Geography and travel difficulties limited information from traveling far (Acts 28:20-22).
 4. The decree was also a temporary measure to placate the Jews (Acts 21:24 cp Heb 9:10).
 5. Paul's application of the decree avoided any overt participation with idols (I Cor 10:28).

8:10 **Bold and public acts by the strong can easily lead the weak to sin against their conscience.**

- A. This verse does not justify or commend sitting at a feast in an idol's temple to get your meat.
 1. Paul will later condemn such close fellowship with the devil's cup and table (10:20-21).
 2. Paul will later allow attending feasts where the source of the meat is unknown (10:27).
 3. The "if ... shall not" construction is gently pointing out the offence issue of such actions.
 4. Paul wisely and gently taught the error of such a choice from a conscience angle only!
- B. If a weak brother saw a strong brother eating meat in the idol's temple, he might copy him.
 1. It is wicked presumption for the strong brother to glory that he got the weak man to eat!
 2. By following his bolder and stronger brother, he ends up sinning against his conscience.
 3. By sinning against his conscience, he violates the Lord's candle in his breast (Pr 20:27).
 4. Having sinned against his conscience, he is weakened and emboldened to sin elsewhere.
- C. Though it was not evil to eat the meat; doing so against conscience was sin (Romans 14:23).

8:11 **Puffed up saints through their so-called knowledge can greatly harm saints Christ died for.**

- A. There are those who will use this text to teach that Jesus Christ died for some that will perish.
- B. But we understand there are more than one perishing, death, damnation, and hell in Scripture.
- C. There is perishing in death and hell to be avoided by corporal punishment (Prov 23:13-14).
- D. A man sinning against his conscience is damned, according to Paul in a place (Rom 14:23).
- E. Sinning against your conscience is damning by bringing God's condemnation on your soul, grieving and quenching the Holy Ghost, and emboldening your conscience to sin elsewhere.
- F. The perishing here is defiling one's conscience (7), wounding one's conscience (12), and offending against his conscience and God (13).
- G. Converting a brother from error saves a soul from death (Jas 5:19-20; Pr 21:16; Luke 15:24).
- H. Paul blames the "knowledge" of the strong brother for wrecking this havoc upon other souls.

8:12 **It is no light thing to offend a brother by liberty, for you are truly sinning against Christ.**

- A. It is erroneous to separate Christ from His brethren, for they are very united (I Jn 4:20 – 5:2).
- B. The Lord Jesus loves all His saints, which makes sin against one of them to be against Christ.
- C. Though a matter of liberty – a thing not involving sin – against your conscience makes it sin.
- D. Though a matter of liberty – a thing not involving sin – it becomes sin if you offend others.
- E. Therefore, lack of charity and love in such matters turns both camps into sinners! God forbid!

8:13 **The mind of the Lord is exemplified by Paul, who would gladly refuse meat to save saints.**

- A. The Lord of glory sacrificed very much to be our Saviour, which we should do toward others.
- B. A servant's heart will not have the selfish pride that causes men to arrogantly offend others.
- C. Every saint must examine his heart and determine if he would give up anything for others.
- D. The cure for weak brethren is not violating their consciences, but rather teaching them; so the man of God must preach the whole word to bring all the saints to knowledge (Eph 4:13).
- E. Some believers are offended with most anything, where there is actually not a conscience at stake, but rather a self-righteous and proud spirit; they will be rebuked and warned.

Conclusion:

1. Knowledge not carefully ruled, especially in matters of liberty, can become an easy source of haughty pride.
2. Charity, easily superior to knowledge, faith, and hope, is always seeking to do what it can to build others up.
3. Knowledge is acquired by process over time, and no man will ever know all he should know before heaven.
4. A greater goal – the first commandment – is to love God supremely and prove His knowledge of us. Glory!
5. Our religion is wrapped up in the glorious knowledge of God our Father and His Son Jesus Christ (Col 2:1-3).
6. Every man's conscience may vary by teaching, experience, or grace; but it should be obeyed as to the Lord.
7. Matters of liberty are unimportant to pleasing God, so we should easily sacrifice them for the help of others.
8. True saints love the children of God and would never think of hurting another saint by bold use of any liberty.
9. True saints do not care about their own knowledge or things, for they are committed to the welfare of others.
10. Therefore, every true saint will have Paul's willingness to sacrifice anything for the spiritual profit of others.
11. Therefore, you must exercise charity and humility in your use of wine, television, cigars, schooling, clothing, music, sports, makeup, friends, reading, childbirth, nutrition, child training, speech, church attendance, or any number of other things in the category of matters of liberty, some of which quickly can become sinful excess.
12. Though much allowance is made for weak brethren, they are not allowed doubtful disputations (Rom 14:1-3).
13. Though much allowance is made for weak brethren, self-righteous Pharisees deserve none (Matt 15:12-14).
14. Though much allowance is made for weak brethren, a pastor's goal is to instruct all consciences (Eph 4:13).
15. Though much allowance is made for weak brethren, we do not tolerate doctrinal error or sin (Rom 16:17-18).

Additional study:

1. Christian liberty in things indifferent is dealt with at length in three places – Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8 and 10.