

Paul's Letters to the Church in Corinth
First Corinthians Chapter Eight
A Christian's Liberty

In the next three chapters Paul deals with the problem of questionable practices that some were indulging in

How far does a Christian's freedom go regarding behavior not specifically forbidden in scripture?

A Christian's liberty is never freedom to sin and should exclude things that in themselves are not sin but may become sin or lead others into sin **1 Peter 2:16**

Meats Sacrificed to Idols – 8:1-8

The confusion over what to eat and what not to eat

Two common extremes are often followed regarding doubtful things:

- A Legalist, where everything is black or white and there are no gray areas
- A Libertine, who holds that they have license that allows everything as acceptable so long as it is not strictly forbidden in scripture **1 Peter 2:16**

It seems that the philosophy at Corinth was more libertine than legalist

The Romans and Greeks were a polytheistic people and worshiped many gods and demons

The myth about knowledge was that it alone protected them from error **Hosea 4:6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; Philippians 2:4; Mark 7:14-23; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Psalm 115:2-8**

The problem is that not all men have this knowledge

A defiled conscience is one that is being ignored and violated **Romans 14:23**

Anyone who caused a weaker brother to defile their conscience or their faith, was leading them into sin

Meats sacrificed to idols **Revelation 2:14,20; Acts 15:28-29**

Paul states in **1 Corinthians 8** and **10** that eating meats sacrificed to idols is not a sin so long as one does not violate their conscience **Romans 14:15**

Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

v.1; v.4

And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

v.2; v.7; Romans 14

But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

v.3; 1 John 1:3-7; 5:3; John 17:21-23; 1 John 4:4,6

Therefore, concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.

v.4; v.8; Mark 7:15; 1 Timothy 4:4; Isaiah 44-46

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for 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 through whom we live.

v.5-6; vs.1,4, & 6; 1 John 4:4,6; Psalm 33:6-9; 148:4-5; Isaiah 45:18; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

v. 7; Acts 17:16; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ezekiel 36:17; 37:23; Hosea 5:3

But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

v.8; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 7:19

Study Questions:

What subject does Paul introduce in **chapter 8**?

What was the spiritual significance of eating sacrifices? Cf. **10:18**.

How does the effect of knowledge differ from that of love? **8:1**;cf. **13:2**.

Is knowledge bad? Can we be saved by love without knowledge?

According to context, what is it that a man may think he knows though he actually lacks knowledge? **8:2**

In what sense is an idol nothing? **8:4**

Explain the concept of many gods in heathen idolatry.

Explain how this differs from the true God.

In what sense are all things “*for*” or “*by*” Christ? **8:5-6**

If an idol is nothing, why would meat offered to it matter?

What did some people think of meat offered to an idol? **8:7** Why?

Summarize the problem Paul is wrestling with here.

What does **8:8** teach?

How does it relate to the context? **vs.4-6**

According to **v.8**, what constitutes a matter of “*liberty*”?

Paul's First Letter to the Church at Corinth – Chapter Eight

Preface to Chapter Eight

In the next three chapters Paul deals with the problem of questionable practices that some were indulging in. In Corinth much of this centered on food that had been offered to idols. At issue was, how far does a Christian's freedom go regarding behavior not specifically forbidden in scripture? Some of the strongest debates among Christians are around questionable practices, those practices many feel wrong but are not specifically forbidden in scripture. A Christian's liberty is a central truth in scripture, but it is not unbridled license. It is never freedom to sin and should exclude things that in themselves are not sin but may become sin or lead others into sin. In **1 Peter 2:16**, Peter wrote that Christians are to live *as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God*. In **v.9** Paul gives us a principle to apply to all doubtful behavior "*But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak*" That principle will be illustrated and applied in **chapters 9 and 10**.

Knowledge and the Eating of Meats Sacrificed to Idols – 8:1-8

The letter that the Corinthian brethren composed, cf. **1 Corinthians 7:1** not only had questions about marriage but about things sacrificed to idols. Much of the confusion over what to eat and what not to eat stemmed from the marrying of Old Testament and New Testament teaching.

[Two common extremes are often followed regarding doubtful things: First, a **Legalist**, where everything is black or white and there are no gray areas. Thus, a legalist lives by rules and the letter of the law apart from the spirit of it. Everything is classified good or bad, things that are compiled into lists of do's and don'ts. Spirituality is seen as doing the things on the good list and not doing the things on the bad list. In this philosophy the inner person often does not seem to matter, just one's outward action. Secondly, a **Libertine**, who holds that they have license that allows everything as acceptable so long as it is not strictly forbidden in scripture. Thus, this view is that if your own conscience is clear one can do as they please. The effect is to believe that Christian freedom is virtually absolute and unqualified. It seems that the philosophy at Corinth was more **libertine** than **legalist**. They wanted no restrictions.]

The Romans and Greeks were a *polytheistic* people and worshiped many gods. They had a god or group of gods for every circumstance, need and activity of life. They were also *polydemonistic* believing in many evil spirits. Sacrificed meat was of great importance regarding both these beliefs as many believed that evil spirits

were constantly trying to invade humans. Their superstition was that the demons attached selves to food before was eaten and the only way remove them was a sacrifice to a god to gain favor with the god who cleansed the meat of evil. The temple priests sold this meat in marketplace and the people believed it was the best meat, because of the cleansing. The problem therefore for some Christians was how this meat was associated with pagan gods and associated with superstition.

[The myth about knowledge was that it *alone* protected them from error. To know that pagan gods were not real, and food sacrificed to them was still food, was to know that food cannot contaminate one spiritually. In that scenario, they believed that they were free to eat whatever wanted no matter what others thought. Knowledge, while extremely important, exercised without love breeds arrogance, **Hosea 4:6** and can be devastating spiritually, **1 Corinthians 13:1-3.**]

Well-rounded Christians think and act based not only upon knowledge but also with its effects upon others in mind, understanding both biblical truth and how they should relate to others. Thus, knowledge alone breeds arrogance not spiritual maturity, **Philippians 2:4** *Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.* Paul first responds to reasons they presented to act as they pleased. Jesus had said, there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him ... this he said, making all meats clean, **Mark 7:14-23.**

[*“When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear! When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. So He said to them, Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods? And He said, what comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”* Although the idol’s image is real, there is no god behind it but just a figment of the imagination of the maker or designer. This very thinking is used by demons to deceive mankind, **1 Corinthians 10:20; Psalm 115:2-8.**]

The problem is that not all men have this knowledge. In Corinth, some were undoubtedly freshly out of paganism and may well have still thought these gods

were real. They may have accepted that there was only one right God, but not fact that there was only one real God. To them, to participate in any way in eating food sacrificed to idols would be a temptation to go back to their former idolatrous activity. [Even though act of eating the meats was not wrong in and of itself, but by eating they would defile their conscience. A defiled conscience is one that is being ignored and violated, which brings about confusion and feelings of guilt. In their minds they would have sinned, and until they fully understood that the act was not a sin in God's eyes, for them it must be avoided, **Romans 14:23** *"he who doubts is condemned if he eats."*] Therefore, anyone who caused a weaker brother to defile their conscience or their faith, was leading them into sin. Knowledge that seems perfectly clear to us may tell us that something is acceptable, but love leads us to not to take advantage of our freedom at the expense of another's conscience.

[If one were to read **Revelation** on eating meats sacrificed to idols the conclusion might be that it is sinful to do, **Revelation 2:14,20**. Again, at the Jerusalem conference the apostles and elders of Jerusalem wrote in **Acts 15:28-29** *"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."* Pagan priests sacrificed animals to their perspective deities just as the Jews sacrificed to Jehovah God. The meats from the sacrifices were not wasted but often sold in the meat markets. The question this chapter deals with is this; Is it sinful for a Christian to eat meats sacrificed to idols? Secondly, would it be sinful to enter an idol's temple and eat the meats within? While looking at the teaching of **Acts 15** and **Revelation 2** one would conclude that anyone eating meats sacrificed to idols would be in sin.]

Paul states in **1 Corinthians 8** and **10** that eating meats sacrificed to idols is not a sin so long as one does not violate their conscience. Paul also said in **Romans 14:15**, *"Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died."* The study of **chapter 8** indicates that it is not man's conscience that must be met but rather God's will. God's decree is that idols are nothing, therefore eating meats sacrificed to a nothing god means nothing unless you believe that it does. God's law reigns supreme; however, man's conscience also is to be considered. The rule appears to be that one's conscience on a given subject equates to law, so long as that conscience act does not cause him to violate the standard of God's will. Matters of incidents, personal judgment, and expediency are ok so long as they do not violate God's laws. Let us therefore carefully examine these chapters.

1 Corinthians 8:1 [*“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.”*]

The *knowledge gnosis* was in the realm of knowing that there is really, only one true God and that an idol was imaginary and non-existent, cf. **1 Corinthians 8:4**. Every true Christian believes in one true God; however, some have a greater understanding of the one true God than others. Such abilities could lead the intelligent informed brother to be arrogant and lacking love. The arrogant with knowledge looked down upon the lesser informed brethren rather than lovingly edifying them.

[The word edify *oikodomeo* is “to build a house ... metaphorically, to build up” Liddell & Scott. “to strengthen one another” AG. Antithetically speaking, “one who does not love *agape* is one who tears down rather than building up and strengthening others.”]

An important thing to note here is that Paul uses the phrase, *concerning things offered to idols* two times, in **8:1a** and **8:4a**. Sandwiched between these two statements are instructions regarding man not knowing what he thinks he knows.

1 Corinthians 8:2 [*“And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”*]

The point is that some people THINK they know things, yet they really do not. When we compare the statements before us with **v.7** it is apparent that though all men thought they had knowledge they really did not.

[Today, most brethren would consider themselves the strong brother of **1 Corinthians 8** and **Romans 14**; however, many of these brothers are telling us that it sinful to eat at restaurants and buy products from companies that support sinful things. Their convictions have gotten the better of them and though they believe themselves to be spiritually strong they are spiritually weak because they let their conscience deem what is right rather than God's standard.]

1 Corinthians 8:3 [*“But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.”*]

If God knows us and we know God we are obviously in spiritual fellowship with the Father. Spiritual matters then, are important to us: To be known of God is to be in fellowship with God, **1 John 1:3-7**; to be known of God is to follow the commandments of God, **1 John 5:3**; to be known of God is have God in us, dwelling in us in that we are one with God in purpose through His commandments, **John 17:21-23**; **1 John 4:4**; and to be known of God is to be able to differentiate, by use of the word of God, the spirit of error and the spirit of truth, **1 John 4:6**. Apparently, Paul speaks of an attitude in this verse. The one with true knowledge and wisdom

is the one who will understand the truth and apply it with love, toward self and others. Questions will be solved in this man's mind by asking, 'what do the scriptures say?' and like the Bereans, finding the answers there.

1 Corinthians 8:4 [*“Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.”*]

Here is the completion of the eating meets sacrificed to idols sandwich. Before Paul discusses the right or wrong of the question, he prefaces his argument with three facts: Not all brethren know what they ought to know even though they think they know; Love of each other and of God should govern all my decisions; and we should be spiritually minded about all questions before us. Now, Paul is ready to answer the question of whether eating meats sacrificed to idols in the temple of idols is wrong or not. Simply put, food has no spiritual significance itself, **v.8** (KJV *commend*). It does not bring us near, beside, closer, or make us approved to God. It is spiritually neutral.

[Physically it may be harmful to us as in being allergic or by under or over-eating. Again, according to **Mark 7:15**, nothing outside a man defiles him, for it is what is in his heart that matters. In addition, we are commanded in **1 Timothy 4:4** to receive all food with thanksgiving.]

Among the Christians there is a common knowledge that an idol is not really anything and that Jehovah God reigns supreme as the one true God. The prophet Isaiah pointedly stated that an idol is an object made by the hands of man, carried by the hands of man, and worshiped by the hands of man. They know nothing, see nothing, understand nothing, and say nothing because they *are* nothing, but an image carved out of mindless stone, clay, or metal, **Isaiah 44-46**. Regarding God, Isaiah also records, *Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,* **46:9**. Paul's point is that every Christian believes the fact that there is only one true God. This is the foundation of his argument!

1 Corinthians 8:5-6 [*“For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for 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 through whom we live.”*]

Note that Paul as included all Christians in **vs.1,4, & 6**. All Christians understand this and by faith believe it. Though the pagans had a deity for many earthly things such as the moon, stars, sun, wind, sea etc. there is in all reality only one true God.

[This one true God is the creator of all things, **Psalm 33:6-9; 148:4-5**. Isaiah said, “*For thus saith Jehovah that created the heavens, the God that formed the earth and made it, that established it and created it not a waste, that formed it to be inhabited: I am Jehovah; and there is none else,*” **Isaiah 45:18**. God created all things with or by Jesus Christ. Jesus was the agency in which creation occurred, **John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2.**]

Finally, Paul states that we as Christians are *for Him* and *through Him*. Christians are *for* Christ in that we are servants of the Lord and we are *through* Christ in that we are redeemed by Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:7 [“*However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.*”]

Paul has said that we all have knowledge in **v.1**, yet now says, *there is not in everyone that knowledge*. First appearance seems to be a contradiction; however, we must understand the context of this series of verses. Remember, the Corinthians are asking, ‘*is it lawful for us to eat meats sacrificed to idols?*’ Such a question reveals the fact that not all really had a true knowledge of the one true God.

[Some Christians were used to *servicing idols*, *sunetheia eos apti* is “habitual intercourse, acquaintance, society, intimacy, habit or custom ...” Liddell & Scott. Many of these Christians had lived in a society where multitudes of deities were worshiped and accepted as real, see **Acts 17:16.**]

By habit and society, they too had come to know other deities. Their conversion to Christianity was a complete 180 degree turn from where they were, from not sure about or even believing in idols, to one God. These brethren's newfound zeal obviously caused their conscience to be bothered if told they were permitted to continue to eat the meats sacrificed to those idols in their temples. They were convicted of the wrong and wanted no part of this now. They would have their weak conscience defiled if they ate meats sacrificed to idols.

[The *conscience*, *suneidesis*, is “a conscious that cannot come to a decision or a conscience of guilt” AG. The conscience of a man determines the right or wrongness of an activity, cf. **2 Corinthians 4:2**. To be *weak*, *asthenes*, is “without strength, weak, feeble, weakly ... too weak to bear labor” Liddell & Scott. “Inferior” Thayer. *Defiled*, *moluno*, is “to stain” Liddell & Scott. “To stain, defile, make impure, soil; i.e. unsoiled garments as symbol of a spotless life Revelation 3:4” AG. “To make filthy or dirty; to pollute; to render impure; corrupt; to profane or sully; to make unclean or unfit for

ceremonial use; to desecrate” American Heritage Dictionary. “To stain, sully; to defile, contaminate morally” Moulton. “To be unclean” Vines.]

To understand the sense of this, how Paul and those of his day, especially those of Jewish background, understood what it meant to be defiled, we must turn to the Old Testament. God’s people were defiled when conducting themselves in sin, **Ezekiel 36:17; 37:23; Hosea 5:3**. The awareness in some, the reality of the one true God, was feeble and thereby corrupted, by entering an idol’s temple to eat meats sacrificed to that idol. Those Christians who were socially and habitually attached to pagan deities defiled and sinned against their knowledge of what was right and wrong to do.

1 Corinthians 8:8 [*“But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.”*]

Again, the question was, *can one eat meats sacrificed to idols in the temple of idols?* Apparently, this question was a source of contention among the brethren. Some believed it to be sin, while others did not. Paul thereby gives divine instruction regarding the matter. All who are spiritually minded will have the same approach to any question. What is God's will?

[To *commend, paristemi*, is “to set before the mind, present, offer, bring home to the mind; to make good, prove, show” Liddell & Scott. Being presented to God in a commendable state is not contingent upon whether one eats certain foods or not. Paul said that *“the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* **Romans 14:17**. Eating was a liberty as was circumcision, cf. **1 Corinthians 7:19**.]

The answer to the question is thereby simple. It is not forbidden to eat meats sacrificed to idols, even in the temple of idols, because the idol does not really exist. The food is the same food both before it was sacrificed, and after it was sacrificed. The food did not change, and therefore it does not matter if one eats it or does not eat it.