

If you had become a Christian in Corinth, you immediately found yourself in a dilemma. Everywhere you went you were faced with idol worship. The trade guilds each had a god they worshiped. Your friends have household gods in their homes. The meat in the marketplace usually came from a pagan temple. The temple priest sacrificed the animal to a god and then took a portion for themselves and sold the rest in the market. If you went to a wedding, the meat was sacrificed to the family god. If you went to a meat vendor, should you ask if the meat came from the temple? Many early Christians became vegetarians to avoid the issue (Romans 14:2<sup>i</sup>). Can you offer incense to the guild god when you go to work, or should you refuse and face accusations from the guild when anything goes wrong?

This issue is still a problem in parts of the world. Thank God we don't face the issue in our culture, but we face similar problems when we are truly born again. In this passage Paul is confronting the liberal group within the Corinthian church. Their justification is quite simple. They say, "There is only one God. Idols are not gods. So it doesn't mean anything when I eat meat offered to a non-entity. My knowledge makes me superior to the new believer who doesn't realize these facts" (Romans 12:16<sup>ii</sup>).

*<sup>1</sup> Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up.* 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 This faction of the church that used the excuse of knowing better to justify eating meat sacrificed to idols can appear in different forms in the church today. The goal of these who justify their actions is self-satisfaction. They say, "If someone is offended, that is their problem. Grow up and learn the truth" (Isaiah 5:21<sup>iii</sup>). Paul is confronting this attitude that "it is all about me." This is one of the major problems in the American church. "What can I get out of this? Which church meets my needs?" As believers, we must allow the life of Christ to become more prevalent than our own desires for having our way, and that results in us sacrificing for one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11<sup>iv</sup>).

One can know that an idol is nothing and that we have the freedom to eat meat offered there for it was dedicated to a non-entity. But by eating it, am I offending a weaker brother, or is an unbeliever getting the impression that I still worship the idol? "Knowledge" alone can be technically right but have devastating results (10:23<sup>v</sup>). If my action is not building up a brother, it may be tearing him down (Ephesians 4:16<sup>vi</sup>; Romans 14:19<sup>vii</sup>). Love has priority over knowledge if we are spirit led believers. What is my action (even if it is not sinful) doing to others?

Paul does not downplay knowledge. He does however imply that prideful knowledge that is willing to justify behavior that harms our fellow believer is the opposite of the first fruit of the Spirit, which is love. **If knowledge is not applied with love, people can be harmed.** I can know that drinking a glass of wine with dinner is not a sin, but if I do so in the home of an alcoholic, I am being heartless. I can know that I am free to eat a piece of cake with a big scoop of ice cream for dessert, but if I offer it to a person who is a diabetic, I'm just being rude. Knowledge can make us pridefully inconsiderate. Are my words and actions drawing people to Christ or pushing them away from Him? Love always seeks the good of others (1 John 4:20<sup>viii</sup>).

*<sup>2</sup> If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.* 1 Corinthians 8:2 We can know something is factual but not know God's heart

about the time and circumstance and the hearts of those who observe our action or hear our words. That means our knowledge is only partial. For example, I can go into a bar and sit down with a prostitute and talk to her about Jesus. I know that is a good thing to do and that I am free to do so, but am I led by the Spirit? Who is going to be damaged spiritually by seeing me there and use it to justify sinful behavior? Will I end up more drawn to sin than her being drawn to Jesus? What we need to know is God's will in each situation, the leading of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10<sup>ix</sup>).

I know a sister in Christ who has that kind of ministry. It is much more appropriate for her, and the prostitute can relate to her better than to a man. When God puts a situation on our heart, it is not always for us to personally deal with it. It may be for us to express the need to someone called to that particular ministry. We think we know a lot, regarding the gospel of Jesus, for we know much more than the world. But that doesn't mean we should charge into every opportunity before us. Pray and get the leading of the Spirit. The Spirit knows the timing, the right person, the proper setting. That is what we will not know except through prayer (Romans 8:14<sup>x</sup>).

<sup>3</sup> *But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.* 1 Corinthians 8:3 C.S. To be known by God reminds us of the final judgment in which Jesus will tell those whom He does not know to depart from Him (Matthew 7:22<sup>xi</sup>). Lewis in *Weight of Glory* says this is glory: **God's commendation, what our heart longs for, the "Well done" that comes from our Creator. By contrast, "I never knew you" is soul chilling.** If you love God you will never hear, "I never knew you."

To be known by God does not mean God is aware of your existence. It means He is in a relationship with you in which you can hear His gentle voice of direction that comes to us through the Holy Spirit. This beautiful verse is here because Paul is implying that to do the will of God at His leading is the knowledge that we need so that we can humbly build up one another rather than to be puffed up in pride (Proverbs 3:7<sup>xii</sup>).

The very fact that you love God means that He is in that very personal relationship with you. Of course, I mean the God of the Bible, not the god of someone's imagination or a false religion. The enemy of our soul is always accusing us (Revelation 12:10<sup>xiii</sup>). That is why many Christians are too hard on themselves and think they may not be saved. Listen to what this verse is declaring. If you love God, He is in a personal relationship with you. It doesn't say if you are perfect, or if you do this or that, but merely if you truly love God. Do you love Jesus to the extent that He comes first in your affections (Matthew 10:37<sup>xiv</sup>)? Then, you are His sheep. You are in the fold. He watches over you and knows you by name (John 10:3<sup>xv</sup>). Rest in that truth dear brothers and sisters.

<sup>4</sup> *Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one."* <sup>5</sup> *For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—* 1 Corinthians 8:4,5 The truth is that there is only one God and one Lord who is Creator and over all. Man has invented many imaginary "gods," and there are "lords" ruling over various areas and beings, but they are nothing compared to God. They exist because God created them. Their power and authority will be gone in an instant at Jesus' return. Even now they can only do what God permits them to do. At Jesus' return everything in heaven and earth will bow the knee to Jesus (Philippians 2:10<sup>xvi</sup>). To oppose the One to whom you owe your existence is insanity.

When I lived in Japan and hiked mountain trails, I would come across mini-shrines with idols carved in stone. Sometimes a dilapidated building would be behind it where a monk once lived. But still, hikers would leave coins and food in front of the idol. I suppose mice appreciated it, as well as hikers low on cash. But I would get a creepy feeling sometimes. I was tempted to take one of the mandarin oranges left as an offering, but I never did. While the stone was just a stone, I wondered if some spiritual entity was behind it receiving the worship (1 Corinthians 10:19,20<sup>xvii</sup>). So while the carved image is nothing, there can be spiritual powers of darkness that crave the worship of man like their master, Lucifer. These are fallen angels who followed him in their rebellion (Revelation 12:4<sup>xviii</sup>; Carson quote<sup>xix</sup>; 1 Corinthians 10:20<sup>xx</sup>). But even these demons cannot act outside of God's permissive will.

*<sup>6</sup> yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.* 1 Corinthians 8:6 *It is interesting to find verse 6 in the middle of this discussion. It is one of the highest Christological statements in the Bible, emphasizing the deity of Christ: "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." The prepositions "from" and "for" are attributed to the one God the Father, and the object of the preposition "through" is the one Lord Jesus Christ. New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham says, "God is not only the agent or efficient cause of creation ('from him are all things') but he's also the final cause and the goal of all things ('to him are all things') but also the instrumental cause ('through him all things')." <sup>xxi</sup>*

*As we see in Deuteronomy 6:4 over and over again—this is what the Jews recite twice every day—"the Lord our God, the Lord is one." The words, "Lord," "God," "our," and "one" ("us") are all found in 1 Corinthians 8:6... Paul brings this up because he's saying that God is sharing his divine identity with the Son, Jesus Christ. And in a similar way Jesus shares his glory with his people—the community of God. The mutual interior deference, love, and sharing within the community of the Trinity between God the Father and God the Son has now become the basis for the community of God's people to share their rights and to revolve around others' needs rather than standing statically and expecting others to orbit around them. <sup>xxii</sup>*

*<sup>7</sup> However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.* 1 Corinthians 8:7 *But not everyone is aware of this truth that an idol is nothing. If they see you eating the meat offered to an idol their conscience will be defiled. Those who once worshiped this way will find themselves violating their conscience to do what their head says is okay. God convicted them in the past before they came to Jesus, and they remember that conviction.*

It is the same for many believers today. They can't be around some legitimate things because they abused them before their conversion. If they abused alcohol, they usually have a conviction to avoid social drinking, even a glass of wine with dinner. If they gave into lust, they are convicted to not be alone with the opposite sex. Recognize their convictions and set aside your freedoms to not offend them and tempt them to fall back into their old lifestyle.

We all have weaknesses and blind spots. Honor the attempt by others to avoid them. Encourage them for their effort to stay wholly submitted to the Lord. Don't be

afraid to let others see your effort to do the same with the areas you know are your weaknesses.

*<sup>8</sup> Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.* 1 Corinthians 8:8 God won't judge you for not eating kosher. It is simply nourishment for the physical body. It won't affect you spiritually (Mark 7:19<sup>xxiii</sup>). Some Messianic Jews keep the kosher laws because of the covenant with Abraham. It doesn't make them a better Christian.

Messianic brothers try to tell me the Gentiles should observe the Sabbath. It was their conviction before conversion, so even when I showed them Scriptures that show that the church gathered on Sunday (Acts 20:7<sup>xxiv</sup>; 1 Corinthians 16:2<sup>xxv</sup>), they held to their conviction. Then I share Romans 14 where the Holy Spirit specifically spells out that the day no longer matters (Romans 14:5,6<sup>xxvi</sup>). **It is the heart of the believer and the righteousness we have in Christ that counts before God (2 Corinthians 5:21<sup>xxvii</sup>).**

Worshiping and resting on Saturday or Sunday doesn't make either of us a better in God's eyes. I am free to worship on Shabbat with him. I am free to esteem all days alike. I can eat kosher, vegan, or even McDonalds (1 Timothy 4:3-5<sup>xxviii</sup>). Those freedoms are our liberty because the Lord is our righteousness. But if I am with a weaker brother, I will strive not to offend his conscience or tempt him to do what he believes is wrong. According to your faith be it unto you (Matthew 9:29<sup>xxix</sup>), but neither should we be unfaithful to properly care for our bodies by consistently eating junk food. We are much more than what we eat, but at the same time we should care for our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19<sup>xxx</sup>).

*<sup>9</sup> But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? <sup>11</sup> And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. <sup>12</sup> Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.* 1 Corinthians 8:9-12 Here is the issue: we might stumble someone who is weak. The act of eating meat that came from a temple is not wrong. But if you offend a weaker brother or sister and cause them to be destroyed, you are sinning not just against them but against God as well (Acts 24:16<sup>xxxi</sup>)! Be wise. Discern what is going on around you and how your actions affect others. Don't push minor issues that would stumble someone who is weaker in the faith. It is what Jesus has done for us that makes us all righteous before God (1 Corinthians 1:30<sup>xxxii</sup>).

As Paul has said earlier in this letter, we are not our own. We have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20<sup>xxxiii</sup>). Everything we do should be to build up our brothers and sisters to glorify God. So many of these minor issues are not important enough to argue about. God can convince the person if it is necessary. Let the Holy Spirit have room to work and don't major on minors.

I have witnessed well-meaning people drive new believers away from fellowship by trying to make them conform to their convictions in some matter. People make an issue over holidays, food, dress, expressions, and things God changed in them, so they are expecting that the new believer needs to conform right away. That is trying to take the place of the Holy Spirit in their lives. I recall one brother trying to tell a new family in the faith that they should not celebrate Christmas by speaking of Santa Claus. He was so adamant that the family never returned.



We can learn from others, but the most lasting change takes place when we realize God is inviting us to change and helping us make the change. God help us let God shape them uniquely. We don't need to replicate who we are or our personal convictions on minor issues. We need to let the life of Jesus be expressed in them in the way He chooses and in His time.

I think with good intentions we sometimes get in the way of what God is doing because we aren't praying about how God would have us bless a person's life. We just think God must want to do in them what He did in us and so we jump in like Peter and get in-between the person and God. Then we are a hinderance rather than a help (Matthew 16:23<sup>xxxiv</sup>).

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.* 1 Corinthians 8:13 The Greek is very emphatic. "I will never eat meat again forever!" It gives us a sense of how important it was to him to not stumble a person who was weak in faith. We are to give up our rights and freedoms if they might stumble someone. Their soul is infinitely more important than my freedom. Jesus died for that brother or sister. If God wants to change their conviction, He can do so by the Word and the Holy Spirit. Let God do the work. Don't push anyone to go against what they believe is a conviction from God unless it is obviously sinful. If they are a child of God, we can trust our heavenly Father to show them the truth.

*Our identity is not bound up in self-expression—it is bound up in the ultimate self-expression of a God who is characterized by self-giving love. The Son gave voluntarily; there was voluntary self-renunciation and self-abasement. The most entitled person gave up his rights for us. That is powerful.*<sup>xxxv</sup> If He could give up His rights to bring us salvation, even letting man do what they did to His body, how much more should we set aside our freedoms to not stumble a brother for whom Christ died? Remember that what we do to the least of our brothers, we have done to Christ (Matthew 25:40<sup>xxxvi</sup>).

*What is the difference between the Christian's behavior and the world's behavior?*

- 1. Judge things by love, not by knowledge (vv. 1-3).*
- 2. Know that food does not make a person spiritual (vv.4-8).*
- 3. Take care—do not be a stumbling block (vv.9-11).*
- 4. Do not wound a brother's conscience: this is a sin against Christ (v.12).*
- 5. Claim the great principle: do nothing that leads a brother astray (v.13).*<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Questions:

- 1 Why was eating meat such a big issue?
- 2 What does Paul tell us is a better guide than knowledge?
- 3 Why is our knowledge incomplete? Application?
- 4 How does verse 3 warn or assure us?
- 5 Review verse six and discuss the meaning.
- 6 What matters in the eyes of God?
- 7 What is the heart of the issue?
- 8 What is more powerful than changing because someone tells you to?
- 9 Why is Paul so emphatic about giving up his freedom?
- 10 Review the summary points.

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<sup>i</sup> **Romans 14:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.

<sup>ii</sup> **Romans 12:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

<sup>iii</sup> **Isaiah 5:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

<sup>iv</sup> **1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

<sup>v</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.

<sup>vi</sup> **Ephesians 4:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

<sup>vii</sup> **Romans 14:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

<sup>viii</sup> **1 John 4:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

<sup>ix</sup> **1 Corinthians 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

<sup>x</sup> **Romans 8:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

<sup>xi</sup> **Matthew 7:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

<sup>xii</sup> **Proverbs 3:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Revelation 12:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Matthew 10:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

<sup>xv</sup> **John 10:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Philippians 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>xvii</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Revelation 12:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

<sup>xix</sup> Behind the idols are demonic forces too dangerous to play with. D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry, Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians*.

<sup>xx</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.

<sup>xxi</sup> Preaching the Word - *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross* p 155,156

<sup>xxii</sup> *ibid*

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xxiii **Mark 7:19 (ESV)**

19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

xxiv **Acts 20:7 (ESV)**

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

xxv **1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)**

2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

xxvi **Romans 14:5-6 (ESV)**

5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

xxvii **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

xxviii **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

xxix **Matthew 9:29 (ESV)**

29 Then he touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it done to you.”

xxx **1 Corinthians 6:19 (ESV)**

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

xxxi **Acts 24:16 (ESV)**

16 So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

xxxii **1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)**

30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

xxxiii **1 Corinthians 6:20 (ESV)**

20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

xxxiv **Matthew 16:23 (ESV)**

23 But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

xxxv Preaching the Word - 1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross

xxxvi **Matthew 25:40 (ESV)**

40 And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

xxxvii Leadership Ministries Worldwide, [The First & Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians](#), The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996), p. 116.