

1st Corinthians Chapter 8.

The first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.

Bill Holdstock

Eating food offered to idols.

Knowledge is fundamental

Verse 1-3

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies. 2. And if any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

Paul says we all have knowledge, and we use that knowledge every day. Some have more knowledge than others. Paul is advising us as to how we use that knowledge. He warns that knowledge 'puffs up' and he tells us that we must use our knowledge with charity or love which edifies.

Love builds up, it has no quality to pull down or to puff up as knowledge does, and it can only be constructive since it is of God. (1 Cor;13). He says in verse 2 that if we think we know anything we know nothing. He who knows most best understands his own ignorance.

The idea here is that those converted to Christianity in the church gained knowledge and with that knowledge, came liberty concerning idols. When my wife and I were introduced to the liberty teaching when we joined a 'Modern church' we really had to think hard about this. The teaching was that we could do all sorts of things because we were now 'free' in Jesus. We felt this was very unwise teaching which got many into difficulties. As Paul says '*All things are lawful to me* (means that Christianity is not a religion which consists of rules or regulations.) *but all things are not expedient* (They are not profitable, certainly not in our Christian walk with God).

God gave each of us a free will we are not His puppets, and He trusts us to keep His Commandments. So the knowledge we obtain from Church, home groups, videos and books must be filtered and prayed over if the message sounds a bit radical. The Christian is not free to do what he or she likes. Paul knew of the difficulty of choosing right from wrong and he often had to make choices, he said '*But I will not be brought under the power of any*'.

Idols are not real gods

Verse 4/5

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in Sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. 5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)

We cannot understand the logic that a man and woman will bow the knee in worship to an image of wood or stone. These idols cannot speak, hear or answer your prayers to it, they cannot breath, walk or stand and yet they are very real to its worshiper. Most of us today will laugh at such worship, but hold on a mo; what do the people worship in the 21st century?

Materialism

Many people are following the false god of money and materialism. People try to find satisfaction in material things but will be sadly disappointed. Jesus said, '*A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions* (Luke 12: 15). The Bible also says, '*For what is a man profited, if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?* (Matt. 16:26) Material things may satisfy the now but will not even count for an eternal life with Jesus.

The Idol of lust

The idol lust and sexual sin is being worshipped and followed by many millions of people all over the world. This idol towers over all aspects of our society. Worshipping this idol has led to the breakup of thousands of marriages. Worshipping this idol has led to the outbreak of new and serious sexually transmitted diseases leading to the use of abortion as a form of birth control. Most people fail to appreciate the magnitude of bloodshed, suffering, and death that legalised abortion has introduced for the human race to deal with. Did you know that the number of abortions worldwide in one year is 42 million! We are shocked when we read about 6 million Jews killed in the concentration camps during the last war, how about 42 million innocent babies put to death before they took their first breath **every year!**

The idol of money

Money and greed are two of the biggest problems in our society today. A footballer in the news of late was reported to earn £60,000 each week. But through pride he made a big mistake and was sacked and has ended up in prison, his money can't help him in there. A newspaper giant was reported to be a multi billionaire of some 14 **billion** but he is still seeking happiness. And they all still want more. I have mentioned before a friend in the family boasted he was just short of the £1 million he was saving for before he died, he became ill and in hospital and I asked him if he wanted to receive Jesus and he turned his head away and said no! A few hours later he breathed his last breath and was gone. He didn't quite reach his goal; he lost all that money, *and* eternity. What did Jesus say about gaining the whole world and losing his soul?

It is even more challenging than that!

Idols are anything or anybody in our life that we regard in higher esteem than Jesus, or that we go to for comfort, security and peace. They are the 'kings' in our life that we choose for ourselves – just as the people chose king Saul. So our family members need to be consecrated to Jesus. We should not hold them in a higher place than Jesus. They should not have more influence in our lives than He does. And then there is the issue of where we seek comfort if we are upset, face discouragement or take the bait of offense.

Do we go straight to the Prince of Peace Himself, or have we cultivated other coping strategies: the box of doughnuts, the several glasses of wine too many. Or perhaps it is the internet for pornography, or recreational drugs or video games. Each of these habits are just counterfeit means of seeking comfort in the midst of a storm. Some of them are not sinful – others are. But regrettably, most of them are just as prevalent among the sleeping church as they are in secular society. So if any of this starts to stir you, then please ask Jesus if there are idols in your life that you need to renounce. Ask Him to forgive you, set you free and make Himself known to you in greater measure

Isaiah 44:18

Read Isaiah Chapter 44 to see what God thinks about Idols and Idol worship. Verse 18 sums up the position of an idol worshiper.

They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts that they cannot understand.

This refers to a willful blindness to the truth. The thing is that you may not think you are an idol worshiper, but an idol is anything that is placed before God, anything that takes the place of worshipping Jesus, think about that!

There is only one God (verse 4-6)

But to us there is but one God, the Father of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him.

Back in the Old Testament Moses taught the Children of Israel that there is only one God.

Deuteronomy 6: 4

Here O Israel: the Lord our God is one.

There are two words in the Hebrew that are used for our word 'one'. The first means 'one' or a single unit. The second means a compound unity and it is the second that is used in this verse; so this implies a Trinity. The Trinity consists of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. One of God's names is 'Elohim' which is a plural noun and that name encompasses all three persons of the Trinity.

Genesis 2: 26 *And God said; Let Us make man in our image and after our likeness.*

The plural in this verse proclaims the three persons of the Divine Trinity Who were 'One' in the creative work. To have different gods for so many different subjects only brings confusion. The Romans were guilty of this; they would say 'that decision is for the gods' being a choice way of passing the buck and not making a decision themselves.

It is a great privilege for the true Christian that we know the true God, and the true Mediator between God and man.

Men, not idols are of God (verse 6)

Paul confirms that it was God who made the earth, and the universe and all things including His creation Man and Woman. God has no need of idols, He did not make them or fashion them in any way. People try to find satisfaction in material things but will be sadly disappointed. Jesus said, '*A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions* (Luke 12: 15). The Bible also says, '*For what is a man profited, if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?*' (Matt. 16:26) Can you imagine Jesus dying on the Cross for an idol? Can you imagine Jesus prophesying the end time wonders or His return to an image of wood or stone? But He created man and woman to commune with and speak of eternal things.

All men do not have knowledge (verse 7)

Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

Still referring to idols Paul explains that some, particularly the Gentile heathen, had been worshipping idols all their lives and now joining the Church at Corinth still regarded sacrifices to idols as real acts of worship not having the true knowledge that idols were nothing. Their consciences being weak were defiled, they were also weak in understanding so while they ate meat sacrificed to pagan gods at these feasts they fell into the Devil's trap of idolatry along with all the others at the feast, and so polluted themselves. Paul said that eating meats offered to idols was to defile the conscience and most found that difficult to accept.

Problems arise from ignorance. (Verse 7)

Ignorance of the scriptures will not exonerate a person from the Judgement of God. Sometimes even when we know what the Bible teaches, Satan will blind our consciences so we sin and threaten our Salvation. In God's mercy when we repent and return to His path He will forgive us. If we don't ask for forgiveness and His mercy, our lives are open to Satan who will be only be too pleased to further defile our hearts toward God.

Meats offered to idols do not defile the meat itself (Verse 8)

But meat commends us not to God; for neither if we eat are we the better; neither if we eat not are we the worse.

These feasts cannot be a recommendation of our souls to Almighty God only the shed blood of Christ can do that. The eating gives us no spiritual advantage, and not eating is no Spiritual loss. As Paul says idols and their offering *are nothing*. Paul continues to caution them against abusing their liberty.

Meats do not make any difference in our relationship to God. (Verse 8)

The eating of meats offered to idols have nothing in them to commend us to God. God is displeased if we put eating of meats or indeed anything before Him because we have knowledge of liberty in Christ. We are not under law but under grace, do not abuse it.

Knowledge and liberty can become stumbling blocks to the weak. (Verse 9)

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak.

Even though you are convinced that an idol is nothing, Paul warns the church to be very careful the liberty that has been found, he calls it *this liberty of yours* in rather a disparaging way, will not hinder a fellow Christian. He says take heed that you do not attend feasts to idols even though you are convinced that an idol is nothing. This 'liberty' may cause another to stumble who still believes idols are very real. He does not have your knowledge so he will commit sin if he follows your example.

Your example could hinder the weak.(Verse 10)

For if any man see you which has knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols.

The example of the strong in the Lord could cause the weak or new Christian to stumble and sin. Plainly should a weak person or a new Christian, as many were at Corinth see you, an upright born again Christian go to places in the town that is suspect, he may follow your example to his destruction. You ought to build up your brother in the good things of God, but by your example instead of building up you encourage him to violate his conscience.

Persons emboldened to sin will perish regardless of Christ's death for him on the Cross (v11)

And through your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died.

Adam Clark

Being first taught by your conduct that there is no harm in eating, he grieves the Spirit of God, becomes again darkened and hardened, and sliding back into idolatry, dies in it and so finally perishes.

So we learn that a man may perish for whom Christ died; of this there is no question. If a man for whom Christ died apostatizing from Christianity returning again to and dying in idolatry, cannot go to heaven, then a man for whom Christ died may perish everlastingly.

And if it were possible for a believer, whether strong or weak, to retrace his steps back to idolatry and die in it, surely it is possible for a man who had escaped the pollutions that are in the world to return to it live and die in its spirit and perish everlastingly also.

Not only the Bible but an eminent Bible scholar as Adam Clark warns us that we can be a hindrance to our fellow Christian and cause them to stumble and perish. I am sure none of us wish to be responsible for a man to lose his eternal life and waste the death of Christ on the Cross for him.

By causing a weak Brother to perish the strong also commit sin. (Verse 12)

This is a serious verse and it shows us that as Born Again Christians we have a responsibility to walk our walk with Jesus in such a way that will not hinder our fellow man. They may not all be as Spiritually mature a Christian as you, they may not be able to resist temptation like you can, so when they watch you do things, or go places that they think or have been taught not to do or go to, they think that thing must be all right to do. What is worse is that you defeat the purpose of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for him or her. If we must be so careful not to hinder other men's eternal destiny, how much more should we avoid sin ourselves! 1. Thessalonians 1.5:22 *Abstain from all appearance of evil.* We must be careful not to get ourselves into any situations where others will judge what we do or where we go as being unrighteous.

The strong in the Lord must set the proper example. (Verse 13)

Romans 14: 13-23 is full of advice about the eating of meats that would hinder the weak Christian. I won't write it all out here read it for yourself. You may say that we today do not eat meat offered to idols, what has this got to do with my life now! Throughout the chapter Paul is concerned that the mature Christian does not behave in such a way that causes his fellow Christian to stumble and lose his faith in the Lord. As he says in the beginning of the chapter if you think you have knowledge you know nothing. Today's saying is 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing' and has much the same meaning. Paul says all things are lawful but not expedient or wise for us to use. We must be very careful that our walk with God is not careless; we may be strong and mature in the faith enough to exercise the liberty we think we have but if that liberty can offend our brother we are guilty of sin.

Verse 12

- *But when you sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience you sin against Christ.*

The teaching of the gospel is to abhor, detest and flee from all abominations and according to the Bible any so called Christian who flirts with the things of the world and the Devil and causes his brother to stumble he will be held responsible not only for his fellow man but his own life too. Not only that, he will bring shame on the name of the Lord.

Hebrews 6:4-6

- *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the Heavenly Gift and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.*

A list of main arguments of Paul

1. *Knowledge is fundamental (v1-3)*
2. *Idols are not real gods (v4-5)*
3. *There is only one God (v4-6)*
4. *Men not idols are of God (v6)*
5. *All men do not have knowledge (v7)*
6. *Problems arise from ignorance and a weak conscience (v7)*
7. *Meats offered to idols do not defile the meat itself (v8)*
8. *The meat does not make any difference to our relationship to God (v8)*
9. *Knowledge and liberty can become stumbling blocks to the weak (v9)*
10. *The example of the strong could cause the weak to sin (v10)*
11. *Persons emboldened to sin will perish regardless of Christ's death for him on the Cross (v11)*
12. *By causing the weak to perish the strong also sin against Christ (v12)*
13. *The strong must set the proper example for the weak so both may be saved (v13)*

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Be blessed

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