

1 CORINTHIANS 8

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Be Intentional
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CHAPTERS 8 THROUGH 10 DEAL WITH THE CHURCH'S QUESTIONS ABOUT MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS. THIS WAS A SERIOUS PROBLEM TO THEM, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE CHURCH WAS COMPOSED OF BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES, AND THE JEWISH BELIEVERS WERE ANXIOUS TO AVOID ANY CONTACT WITH HEATHEN IDOLATRY. THE SITUATION WAS THIS: MOST OF THE MEAT IN CORINTH WAS SLAUGHTERED AT THE TEMPLES. THE PRIEST KEPT PART OF THE MEAT, BUT THE REST WAS USED FOR PRIVATE FEASTS OR SOLD IN THE MARKETS. IN FACT, SACRIFICIAL MEAT WAS SOLD AT A CHEAPER PRICE, MAKING IT THAT MUCH MORE ATTRACTIVE TO THESE POOR CHRISTIANS. IF A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOR INVITED A CHRISTIAN TO A FEAST, IT WAS LIKELY THAT THE MEAT HAD BEEN DEDICATED TO AN IDOL. SHOULD THE CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATE IN THE FEAST? WOULD SOME DEMONIC POWER BE PRESENT IN THE MEAT AND INJURE THE BELIEVER? WOULD EATING SUCH MEAT DEFILE THE CHRISTIAN?

WE DON'T FACE THIS SAME PROBLEM TODAY, BUT THE BASIC SITUATION IS STILL WITH US: DOES A CHRISTIAN, BECAUSE HE IS SET FREE FROM THE LAW, HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE ANY WAY HE PLEASURES? THERE ARE MANY PRACTICES THAT WE KNOW FROM SCRIPTURE ARE DEFINITELY WRONG, BUT THERE ARE ALSO MANY BORDERLINE PROBLEMS ABOUT WHICH EVEN DEDICATED CHRISTIANS DISAGREE. IN THESE THREE CHAPTERS, PAUL OUTLINES THE BASIC PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD GOVERN OUR LIVES WHEN IT COMES TO QUESTIONABLE THINGS. HERE IN CHAPTER 8, HE USES THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST AND STATES THAT WE MUST BE CONTROLLED BY LOVE SO AS NOT TO CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE (SEE MATT. 17:24–27). IN CHAPTER 9, PAUL USES HIMSELF AS AN EXAMPLE, POINTING OUT THAT IT IS NOT NECESSARY FOR CHRISTIANS TO USE THEIR RIGHTS IN ORDER TO BE HAPPY; FOR PAUL LAID ASIDE EVEN LEGITIMATE RIGHTS IN ORDER TO SERVE CHRIST. FINALLY, IN CHAPTER 10, HE USES THE EXAMPLE OF ISRAEL TO WARN BELIEVERS ABOUT PRESUMPTUOUS SINS, PARTICULARLY THOSE CONNECTED WITH IDOLATRY AND IMMORALITY.

HERE IN CHAPTER 8, PAUL GIVES FOUR ADMONITIONS FOR US TO FOLLOW IN DISCERNING RIGHT AND WRONG IN THE AREA OF QUESTIONABLE THINGS.

I. CONSIDER YOUR OWN ATTITUDE (8:1–3)

TOO OFTEN STRONG CHRISTIANS WHO KNOW THE BIBLE ARE PRONE TO BE "PUFFED UP" WHEN THEY DEAL WITH WEAKER CHRISTIANS. PAUL ADMITS HERE, AS WELL AS IN ROM. 14, THAT SOME BELIEVERS ARE STRONG IN THE FAITH AND MATURE, WHILE OTHERS ARE WEAK AND HAVE LEGALISTIC VIEWS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. "KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP, BUT LOVE BUILDS UP!" (V. 1). IN FACT, THE MAN WHO THINKS HE KNOWS EVERYTHING IS ADMITTING THAT HE KNOWS NOTHING! PAUL IS NOT ENCOURAGING US TO BE "IGNORANT BRETHREN," BUT RATHER IS WARNING US THAT A PROUD ATTITUDE IS NOT CHRIST-LIKE. KNOWLEDGE MUST BE BALANCED WITH LOVE, LOVE FOR GOD AND FOR OUR BRETHREN. WE MUST NOT JUDGE ONE ANOTHER OR REJECT ONE ANOTHER (ROM. 14:4–12).

II. CONSIDER YOUR BROTHER'S KNOWLEDGE (8:4–8)

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE CANNOT BE LIVED IN ITS FULLNESS IF A MAN IS IGNORANT OF THE WORD. WE MUST ALWAYS TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THAT SOME CHRISTIANS DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY WE HAVE IN CHRIST. THEY LIVE IN RELIGIOUS BONDAGE AND TRY TO REGULATE THEIR LIVES WITH RULES AND RITUALS (SEE COL. 2:16–23). PAUL CLEARLY STATES THAT IDOLS ARE NOT REAL, AND THAT MEAT OFFERED TO IDOLS COULD NEVER HURT ANYBODY'S BODY OR SPIRIT (V. 8). THERE IS ONE GOD AND SAVIOR, AND WE WORSHIP AND OBEY ONLY THE LORD. BUT SOME CHRISTIANS DO NOT HAVE THIS KNOWLEDGE. THEY DO NOT REALIZE THAT NO FOOD IS SINFUL OF ITSELF (NOTE ROM. 14:14), AND THAT MEAT AND DRINK CAN NEVER MAKE ANYBODY A BETTER CHRISTIAN. HOW PATIENT CHRIST WAS WITH HIS IGNORANT DISCIPLES! AND HOW PATIENT WE MUST BE WITH ONE ANOTHER! AS A CHRISTIAN GROWS IN GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE, THROUGH READING AND OBEYING THE WORD, HE UNDERSTANDS THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SETS HIM FREE (JOHN 8:32). HE SEES KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL WITH WHICH TO BUILD, NOT A WEAPON WITH WHICH TO FIGHT.

III. CONSIDER YOUR BROTHER'S CONSCIENCE (8:9–11)

CONSCIENCE IS THAT INNER JUDGE THAT CONDEMNS US WHEN WE DO WRONG AND COMMENDS US WHEN WE DO RIGHT. IT "BEARS WITNESS" TO US (ROM. 2:15 AND 9:1). THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSCIENCE HAS BEEN PURGED (HEB. 9:14 AND 10:22) AND IS TERMED A "GOOD CONSCIENCE" (1 TIM. 1:5, 19). REPEATED SIN NOT JUDGED AND CONFESSED WILL MAKE IT A DEFILED CONSCIENCE (TITUS 1:15) AND EVENTUALLY A SEARED CONSCIENCE (1 TIM. 4:2) THAT NO LONGER CONVICTS. WE MUST STRIVE TO HAVE A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENSE (ACTS 24:16).

THE NEW CHRISTIAN, OR THE UNTAUGHT CHRISTIAN, WILL HAVE A WEAK CONSCIENCE (1 COR. 8:7, 10, 12). IF HE SEES ANOTHER CHRISTIAN EATING MEAT THAT HAD BEEN DEDICATED TO A HEATHEN GOD, THIS EXPERIENCE MIGHT OFFEND HIM AND PERHAPS LEAD HIM INTO SIN. BECAUSE HIS SPIRITUAL SENSES ARE NOT FULLY DEVELOPED, HE WILL GO TO THE OTHER EXTREME AND PERHAPS DISGRACE THE NAME OF CHRIST (SEE HEB. 5:11–14). A MATURE CHRISTIAN, WITH A STRONG CONSCIENCE, WILL NOT BE AFFECTED BY THE HEATHEN AROUND HIM; BUT THE BELIEVER WITH A WEAK CONSCIENCE WILL BE CONFUSED AND, IF HE FOLLOWS HIS BROTHER'S EXAMPLE, MIGHT GET INTO TROUBLE.

PAUL TAKES UP THIS SAME PRINCIPLE IN 10:25–33, SO WE MIGHT LOOK AHEAD AT THESE VERSES. "DON'T GO AROUND BEING A SPIRITUAL DETECTIVE!" HE STATES. "IF INVITED TO A FEAST, AND IF YOU ARE DISPOSED TO GO, THEN GO RIGHT AHEAD; BUT DON'T ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS. HOWEVER, IF THE HOST TELLS YOU THAT THE MEAT WAS SACRIFICED TO AN IDOL, DO NOT EAT IT! WHY? SO THAT YOU CAN BE A TESTIMONY TO THE WEAKER CHRISTIAN WHO MIGHT BE OFFENDED AND LEAD INTO SIN." PAUL THEN ANTICIPATES AN ARGUMENT. "BUT, YOU ASK, WHY SHOULD WE HAVE OUR LIBERTY LIMITED BY SOMEBODY ELSE'S IMMATURITY? IF WE BLESS THE FOOD AND EAT FOR GOD'S GLORY, ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?" NO! BELIEVERS ARE TO FOLLOW A DIFFERENT RULE. WE CHRISTIANS MUST DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE NOT TO OFFEND THE JEWS, GENTILES, OR OTHER CHRISTIANS.

IT BOILS DOWN TO THIS: WHATEVER A CHRISTIAN DOES, EVEN IF IT DOES NOT HURT HIM, MUST NEVER HURT ANYONE ELSE. WHILE WE MAY THINK THAT THIS PRINCIPLE LIMITS US, IT REALLY DOES NOT, FOR IT ALLOWS US TO BE A GREATER BLESSING TO OTHERS AND TO WIN THE LOST TO CHRIST (10:33).

IV. CONSIDER CHRIST (8:12–13)

OUR LORD, IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH HERE ON EARTH, WAS CAREFUL NEVER TO CAUSE OTHERS TO STUMBLE. THE INCIDENT IN MATT. 17:24–27 ILLUSTRATES THIS. “LEST WE SHOULD CAUSE THEM TO STUMBLE” IS A WONDERFUL PRINCIPLE TO FOLLOW, FOR IT MEANS PUTTING CHRISTIAN LOVE INTO DAILY LIVING. CHRIST DIED FOR THE WEAKER CHRISTIAN, THEREFORE WE DARE NOT CAUSE THEM TO SIN. TO SIN AGAINST ANOTHER CHRISTIAN IS TO SIN AGAINST CHRIST! IT WOULD BE BETTER TO GO WITHOUT MEAT THAN TO MAKE OTHERS FALL, SAYS PAUL.

WE CAN THINK OF DOZENS OF APPLICATIONS OF THIS PRINCIPLE IN MODERN LIFE. TAKE THE WORLD OF AMUSEMENTS, FOR EXAMPLE. ONE PERSON MIGHT BE ABLE TO ATTEND A THEATER AND NOT SUFFER FROM IT SPIRITUALLY; BUT IF THIS ACT LEADS A WEAKER CHRISTIAN ASTRAY, THEN THE STRONGER CHRISTIAN HAS SINNED. A MATURE CHRISTIAN MIGHT BE ABLE TO READ A POPULAR NOVEL AND NOT BE AFFECTED; BUT IF HIS SELECTION CAUSES ANOTHER TO STUMBLE, HE HAS SINNED. YES, WE HAVE LIBERTY AS CHRISTIANS; BUT WE ARE NOT AT LIBERTY TO BECOME STUMBLING BLOCKS TO OTHERS. WHAT A TRAGEDY IF A BELIEVER WERE TO BACKSLIDE, OR A LOST SINNER REJECT CHRIST, BECAUSE A CHRISTIAN SELFISHLY ASSERTED “HIS RIGHTS” AND SET THE WRONG EXAMPLE. “LET NO MAN THINK ONLY OF HIS OWN GOOD, BUT LET HIM THINK OF THE GOOD OF OTHERS,” PAUL STATES IN 10:24—THAT IS A WONDERFUL PRINCIPLE TO FOLLOW!