

1Cor. 8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

Paul now moves on to another area of concern for the members of the church at Corinth. He seems to indicate that the people were quite knowledgeable regarding idol worship; it permeated their culture. Because there were many priests representing so many different “gods” in their culture, the priests couldn’t utilize their portion of all the sacrifices made to these pagan “gods.” So a lot of the meat in the public markets came from the priests’ portion of the sacrifices to those idols. Obviously, the meat was of the same nutritional value whether or not it was offered to idols. However, this was one of the few areas about which the leadership of the church in Jerusalem had given specific guidelines for the Gentile believers.

Acts 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

Paul immediately turns the focus of obedience to consideration of the heart and intent of the law vs. the letter of the law. Jesus did the same thing in His teaching of the Sermon on the Mount beginning in Matthew 5. It is in the nature of man to take pride in adhering to the law, but only through the rebirth of the spirit of man through faith in Christ does he/she become more concerned with how their actions impact others. A charitable response to the freedom we have in Christ is to make choices that will edify or build up the body of believers. The Greek word for *charity* is the word *agape*, the word for unconditional love.

1Cor. 8:2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

This verse makes me think of the saying, “The more you know, the more you realize how much you don’t know.” That is the way we should respond to knowledge. As Christ so painstakingly pointed out in His teaching, actions that result from heart knowledge are far more important than those that result from head knowledge.

1Cor. 8:3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

This is a powerful statement. The apostle is saying that a person who loves God is easily recognized—both by others and by God. Again, the word for *love* is the word *agape*, which makes specific reference to love as a result of choice based on principles and duty. Loving God (and others as a result) is a choice. That choice will have direct impact on other choices the believer makes in his/her life.

1Cor. 8:4 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.

Now Paul begins to present the facts for consideration. The child of God knows that an idol is a worthless piece of junk. There is only one God in the world worthy of worship and Who is The Source of all power, knowledge, truth, love, wisdom, etc. Technically, the meat offered to idols is no different than any other meat. The idol effects absolutely no change in the meat.

1Cor. 8:5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)

1Cor. 8:6 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.*

Man is the one that has labeled different entities as “gods” and “lords.” Only YHWH has personally identified Himself as the eternal, self-existent, almighty, Creator God, possessor of heaven and earth.

Gen. 14:19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed *be* Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

Deut. 4:39 Know therefore this day, and consider *it* in thine heart, that the LORD *he is* God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: *there is* none else.

Paul states this truth more specifically in his letter to the Colossians.

Col. 1:12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

Col. 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

Col. 1:14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins:

Col. 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

Col. 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

Col. 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

1Cor. 8:7 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.*

Paul now clarifies that the knowledge is not inherent in every man that allows him to discern the truth about this meat. Our conscience is our source of discernment regarding right and wrong. In part of our conscience we possess knowledge planted there by God to point us to our need for Him.

Rom. 1:19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.

Rom. 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

The major part of our conscience is determined by life—from experience, training, and environment. In Corinth, idol worship was a dominant feature of the culture. It would not be uncommon for new believers to feel a loathing for anything associated with their former way of life. The meat was so connected to the worship of the idols that to eat it would be like partaking of idol worship again. Paul describes the condition of their conscience as weak. These believers were not strong enough spiritually to make a distinction between the act of worship and the meat itself. I think it is a built-in protective instinct to allow the new believer time to grow in spiritual understanding. For them to eat the meat

offered to idols registered as “wrong,” and choosing to do something that you think is wrong is a sin.

1Cor. 8:8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

Paul now makes it clear that what we eat is not considered in God’s assessment of our character.

1Cor. 8:9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

The scripture declares that to live in obedience to God gives us freedom. The key is to recognize that freedom as a choice to embrace God’s will and His commands as expressions of His love for us. It’s like we are surrounded with a loving protective barrier within which we can enjoy life.

Psa. 119:45 And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

Gal. 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

However, the freedom we have in Christ is not a license to act without consideration of how those actions impact others. Instead, we are to embrace that freedom as an expression of our love for God (cf v3). By choosing to love God, we are choosing to love our fellow believers; we are all part of the same family. That love will guide us into actions that will build up, encourage and strengthen the faith of other believers—not tear them down, discourage them, and cause them to stumble.

1Cor. 8:10 For if any man see thee which hast 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;

1Cor. 8:11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

Making the choice to eat in a restaurant or home that is serving the meat offered to idols is a selfish choice when that choice will tempt another believer to go against his conscience. If he/she gives in to that temptation, then he/she has fallen into sin. It could be the sin that causes him to think he cannot live the life of faith, so why try.

1Cor. 8:12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

When the believer knowingly chooses to make that selfish choice in spite of the temptation it will cause the believer with the weaker conscience, it is a sin against the Lord who redeemed you with His own blood. His example of sacrifice goes far beyond any sacrifice we will ever have to consider making.

Jesus taught that He considers our actions toward fellow believers as actions in support of or against him.

Matt. 25:35-45 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw

we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

1Cor. 8:13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Paul's conclusion—It is far better to avoid eating the meat in question than to risk causing a fellow believer to stumble in his/her walk of faith and choose to do that which is conscience has told him is wrong.

Obviously, the principle to us as believers today goes far beyond the issue of choosing what is acceptable to eat. The heart principle is to be applied to the questions of our day and our culture. Things that would fall into this category today would be in the areas of entertainment and fashion. It just seemed appropriate to me to include an excerpt from my study in Romans at this point since it covers the same principles.

Rom. 14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.

I like the wording of the Complete Jewish bible for this verse.

Therefore, let's stop passing judgment on each other! Instead, make this one judgment — not to put a stumbling block or a snare in a brother's way.

It's much easier to put our focus on what is "wrong" in someone else's life than it is to focus on our own responsibility in a given situation. Our responsibility is to reflect the Lord Jesus in everything we do and say. We are to be humble and have the mind of a servant toward others. Toward those who are weaker in faith than we, our priority should be to encourage them and strengthen them in their faith. We should be careful not to let our freedom be the cause of their stumbling.

Rom. 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

Rom. 14:15 But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

In context, we can see that the reference to “unclean” is connected to “meat.” This would have been especially significant to any Jews who would hear this letter. The book of Leviticus is very specific regarding what they were to consider *clean* and *unclean*. I was reading through Eerdman’s Dictionary on this subject and found this statement:

“The distinction between clean and unclean was a reminder of Israel’s call to holiness (Exod. 22:31[MT 30]; Lev. 20:22-26; Deut. 14:2). Holiness implied separation from the common or the profane.”

When Jesus came, He “fulfilled” the law; He met every requirement. Through faith in Him, man can now be declared “righteous.” By fulfilling the law and overcoming the curse of sin, Jesus began to emphasize what really *defiles* a man, or makes him truly unclean or unholy.

Mark 7:15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.

“am persuaded by the Lord Jesus” – Paul is careful to emphasize that he is declaring the truth as revealed to him by the Lord. He is more specific in this regard in his letter to Timothy.

1Tim. 4:1 **Now the Spirit speaketh expressly**, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils...

1Tim. 4:3 Forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

1Tim. 4:4 For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

1Tim. 4:5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The last half of verse 14 presents a very interesting spiritual principle. It is a truth that comes into play in my life constantly. If we consciously make a choice to do something that we believe makes us unclean/unholy, it is a sin for us.

Finding the balance in the practice of my freedom in Christ vs. discernment between what is right and wrong has been a real area of concern for me. I have erred so often in making compromises in my past, that I tend to be a bit more legalistic in the choices I make now. I believe that I need to be more circumspect than others because of the weakness of my flesh. I also have to work at not being judgmental towards those who seem to exercise too much freedom in their choices in my opinion. I have learned to be strong in the choices that are right for me while hopefully not alienating others. This struggle is by far greater in fellowship with my extended family than in fellowship with friends.

Rom. 14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

Rom. 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

I like what David Guzik had to say about verse 16:

“Our liberty in Jesus and freedom from the law is **good**, but not if we use it to destroy another brother in Christ. If we do that, then it could rightly be spoken of as evil.”

The concerns and priorities of life and service in the kingdom of God, the body of believers, are not food and drink. We are not to give thought to what we eat or drink. God will provide for those of His kingdom. Our priorities are regarding our relationship to our God and our brothers and sisters in the faith. I believe that is what Christ was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matt. 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, **Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.** Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Matt. 6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Matt. 6:27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

Matt. 6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

Matt. 6:29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Matt. 6:30 Wherefore, **if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you,** O ye of little faith?

Matt. 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Matt. 6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) **for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.**

Matt. 6:33 **But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.**

I like the following comment from JFB on verse 17.

The first — "righteousness" — has respect to *God*, denoting here "rectitude," in its widest sense (as in Matthew 6:33); the second — "peace" — has respect to *our neighbors*, denoting "concord" among brethren (as is plain from Romans 14:19; compare Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:14, 15); the third — "joy in the Holy Ghost" — has respect to *ourselves*.

Rom. 14:18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

"in these things" – This phrase seems to be referring back to "righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

"Righteousness" in verse 17 is defined in the Greek as "equity (of character or act)." Webster defines equity as "according to reason, and the law of God to man." I would conclude that to serve God in righteousness is to live so that our character and our actions reflect submission to God and obedience to His commands.

"Peace" is a reference to being "set at one again" in our relationship to God. When we serve God in *peace*, we are again reflecting an attitude of submission

and contentment in our relationship to God that will in turn produce *peace* in the kingdom of God.

“Joy in the Holy Ghost” seems to be the direct result of serving God in righteousness and peace. When we are living in submission and obedience to God, the Holy Spirit will be able to bring forth the fruit of love in our life that expresses itself in *joy*.

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...

Rom. 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

I conclude from the previous verses that peace is a result of serving God in submission and obedience. As each believer finds peace through his relationship to God, he will in turn promote peace among other believers. To edify is to improve and strengthen; peace in the body of believers only strengthens and improves our testimony before others.

Again, I am reminded of my life verse:

Is. 26:3 Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusteth in thee.

As I continued to look at this verse, the phrase “follow after” jumped out. This references a choice that results in action. We never benefit from knowing what is right if we are not willing to act upon that knowledge.

Rom. 14:20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence.

Paul again emphasizes the main truth of this passage. Although referencing the example of whether or not it is right to eat meat, the issue is freedom in Christ vs. responsibility to the brother in Christ. We are not to use our liberty to cause another to stumble; that would destroy the work of God.

In the second half of the verse the issue is freedom in Christ vs. our responsibility to obey Him according to our understanding of the truth. Even if an action is not sinful in and of itself, it becomes a sin in one’s life when that action is taken in disobedience to what one believes is right before God.

Rom. 14:21 *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.*

Paul is very consistent at hammering home his message. We are to take no action that we know would cause a brother or sister in the faith to stumble in his/her faith.