

March 14, 2021

# How Will You Use Your Christian Knowledge?

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

## **The general vs. the specific**

As we have been going through 1 Corinthians chapter by chapter, verse by verse, Paul has been addressing several problems that this precious Church had. In chapters 1-4, Paul addressed the problem of party spirit. In chapter 5, it was their refusal to practice church discipline. In chapter 6, some were taking each other to court, while others were visiting prostitutes. In chapter 7, he addressed their perplexities about sex, marriage and singleness. Here in chapter 8 Paul brings a new problem that will take us through chapter 10. And again we find that he operating on two levels: the general principle and the specific circumstance. The specific circumstance Paul is addressing the issue of food sacrificed to idols. But the general principle is this: how should Christians use their knowledge? Does that seem like very strange question to you? Is there a Christian way to use your knowledge? Yes, yes there is.

## **The great fallacy**

The gospel changes everything. When you became a Christian, you were transferred from the Kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son. You were born again, the seed of God was implanted in you, you became a whole new creation, you are no longer your own but you have been bought with a price. And what Paul has been showing us in 1 Corinthians is that this simply changes everything. The great fallacy the Corinthians faced was they thought could simply go on living as they were when they were pagans. Paul is showing once again that this is false.

## *The Big Idea...*

Now that you are a Christian you have a whole new relationship with knowledge *itself*, therefore take care how you use it so that you don't cause your brother to sin

- ☆ The Knowledge That Puffs Up (v.1-3)
- ☆ The Knowledge That Is Not Possessed By All (v.4-7)
- ☆ The Knowledge That Gives Preference and Protects (v.8-13)

### I. The Knowledge That Puffs Up

#### **Three ways to come into contact idol meat**

Please look with me at v.1, Paul writes “Now concerning food offered to idols.” Now this topic essentially takes up the subject matter of ch.8, ch.9, and ch. 10. You have to understand that this was a massive issue. Before many of these Corinthians were converted to Christ, they worshipped pagan deities. Part of their worship included offering animals as sacrifices. Now this idol meat was then consumed in one of three ways: **1)** In feasts held in the dining halls attached to the pagan temples; **2)** At the dinner in a private home of a pagan neighbor; or **3)** It could be purchased at the local meat market.<sup>1</sup> “As it turns out, a large percentage of the meat available for consumption would have been previously offered to an idol.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 368-369

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 369

### **The problem: “If I eat, am I committing idolatry?”**

Here’s the problem, since that meat was intimately involved in pagan worship, would eating the meat involve you in said worship? “If I eat, am I committing idolatry?” To mix the worship of the Lord God with any other so-called God is strictly forbidden. It’s the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (**Exodus 20:3**). Now Paul’s position in this chapter is abundantly clear: eating meat sacrificed to idols in no way means you are participating in pagan worship. You can eat the meat, and there is no sin whatsoever.

### **Knowledge puffs up?**

Some of the Corinthians knew this all too well. Look at the middle of v.1. “...we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up...” Stop. I can’t tell you the number of times I have heard Christians quote this passage out of its context as an argument against learning doctrine: ‘Ah, we shouldn’t learn too much doctrine because the Bible says ‘knowledge puffs up,’ knowledge will make you arrogant. Is that what Paul is saying? Absolutely not.

It is the wise man who seeks knowledge: **Proverbs 18:15** “An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”

King Solomon prayed for wisdom and *knowledge* to be able to govern God's people and **1 Kings 3:10** that “...it pleased the LORD that Solomon asked this.”

Only fools hate knowledge: **Proverbs 1:22** “How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?”

Those who reject knowledge are destroyed: **Hosea 4:6** “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

Knowledge is pleasant to the soul: **Proverbs 2:10** “...for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.”

It is more valuable than gold: **Proverbs 8:10** “Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold.”

The lips of pastors ought to speak knowledge: **Malachi 2:7** “For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

To fear the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: **Proverbs 1:7** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

Christ Himself is the treasure chest of all wisdom and knowledge: **Colossians 2:3** “...in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

### **Knowledge without love puffs up**

So no, Paul is not teaching us that knowledge *in itself* puffs up.<sup>3</sup> He’s not encouraging anti-intellectualism. The issue in Corinth was that some of the Corinthians (the stronger brothers) had a certain knowledge that the others (the weaker brothers) did not have, *namely* the knowledge that idols were really nothing at all (v.7). Here’s the irony: the stronger brothers were *doctrinally* right, but they were *practically* wrong. In fact, they were dead wrong. They had separated their knowledge of the truth *from* their love of the brothers. Knowledge without love is deadly. The early Church father said here “...when [knowledge] is without *love*, it lifts men up to absolute arrogance.”<sup>4</sup> Any piece of knowledge—no matter how correct it is—if it is missing love, if it is only

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<sup>3</sup> Paul tells us in the book that knowledge is a Divine gift: 1 Corinthians 12:8 “For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit.”

<sup>4</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 375

concerned with its own interests and not the interests of others<sup>5</sup>—is arrogant. In fact, Paul says this is an imagined type of knowledge. Look at v.3 “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.” “Only when a person has love can he be said to know as he ought to know.”<sup>6</sup>

**1st principle: You are always increasing someone with your knowledge**

So here’s our **first principle**: You are always increasing *someone* with your use of knowledge: either yourself or others. End of v.1 “This ‘knowledge’ *puffs up*, but love *builds up*.” **Knowledge without love** makes one’s self *increase in size* like a balloon being blown up with hot air.<sup>7</sup> But **knowledge with love** makes others *increase in size* like the way that a building is built up.<sup>8</sup> So test yourself: are you using your knowledge to build up others? Or are you using your knowledge to puff up yourself? Do you see? Paul is teaching us that becoming

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<sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:4 “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

<sup>6</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 375

<sup>7</sup> Knowledge without love is the arrogant speech of King Nebuchadnezzar: “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” Daniel 4:30

<sup>8</sup> Knowledge with love is the gracious speech of the Apostle Paul: “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.” 2 Corinthians 12:15

a Christian doesn't merely change your relationship with God. It changes your relationship with knowledge itself, and how you use it.<sup>9</sup>

### Being known by God

The great temptation in the Christian life is to use the Lord's gifts *for ourselves*. Knowledge is one of those gifts. Whenever we use our knowledge in a way that is insensitive to others, we are being arrogant. That is not what knowledge was given to us for. So how do we keep the pride over our knowledge in check? Look at **v.3** "But if anyone loves God, he is *known* by God." Do you see what he's doing? He's comparing what we know in **v.1** "all of us possess *knowledge*" to what God knows in **v.3** "but...[you are] *known* by God." In other words, "What counts is not so much our knowledge of God as God's knowledge of us."<sup>10</sup> Beloved you are *known* by God. What does that mean?

### Elect

Being known by God means that He chose you before the foundation of the world (**Eph. 1:4**). Not because He foresaw faith or good works in you (**Romans**

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<sup>9</sup> The four lepers

There's a story in **2 Kings 7** about the siege that the Syrian army laid against Samaria. The siege lasted so long that a dreadful famine came over the people of Syria. Finally some lepers decided they would go out to the Syrian camp. They reasoned to themselves that to stay in the city was certain death, perhaps the Syrians would spare them and they would live. So they go out to the Syrian camp. But when they got there they discovered that the Lord had defeated the Syrians and caused them to flee in such a panic that they left all their food and gold and clothing. So these starving lepers began to plunder the camp. **1 Kings 7:8** says "... they went into a tent and ate and drank, and they carried off silver and gold and clothing and went and hid them." But suddenly it occurred to them that they were sinning because they hadn't shared this knowledge with the starving people of Samaria. **v.9** says "Then they said to one another, '*We are not doing right*. This day is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come; let us go and tell the king's household.'" What were the lepers doing wrong? They were using their knowledge *selfishly*. Their own kin were under famine while they were feasting. When they realized their great sin, they repented and became a source of great celebration to their brothers.

<sup>10</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 377

9:11). Rather He chose out of His mere good pleasure and free grace (**Ephesians 1:5-6**). The Lord chose you *because* the LORD loves you (**Deuteronomy 7:7-8**). He could have passed you by like did with countless others. You could have been the Pharaoh whose heart the Lord hardened (**Exodus 7:3**); you could have been the Esau whom the Lord hated (**Romans 9:13**), but no You were the Jacob whom He loved.

### **Predestination**

Being known by God means that He foreordained all the means necessary for your salvation (**1 Peter 1:2**). It means that He has decreed that even your worst sins will work out for your good (**Romans 8:28**).

### **Atonement**

Being known by God means that He didn't set aside your sins, but that He dealt with them fully and finally in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the very essence of being known by God: "...not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (**1 John 4:10**)

### **Effectual Calling**

Being known by God means that when you heard the gospel of promise, the Holy Spirit of God didn't merely invite you to believe the gospel, but He renewed and powerfully determined your very will (**Ezekiel 36:26**) so that you would be willing and able to freely embrace the grace offered to you in the gospel (**Phil. 2:13**).

### **Justification**

Being known by God means that because you have been justified by faith, you now have peace with Him (**Romans 5:1**). He required that your sins be punished, so He provided His only Son to take that punishment for you (**2 Cor. 5:21**). He required that you possess a perfect righteousness, so He also provided that through Jesus' perfect obedience to the law (**Romans 5:19**). He required

that you believe this gospel message, so He also provided that as a free gift of grace: “It has been granted to you [to] believe in Him” (**Philippians 1:29**).

### **Union**

Being known by God means that you are in union with Christ Himself, that you are spiritually and mystically united to Him (**1 Cor. 6:17**); that He is Your head and Husband (**Ephesians 5:30**) that now nothing whether created or uncreated can ever separate you from Him (**Romans 8:35**).

### **Perseverance**

Being known by God means that you can never fall away or lose your salvation. Even when you are rebellious and faithless, He will be faithful for He cannot deny Himself (**2 Tim. 2:13**). Jesus promised “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (**Hebrews 13:5**). Though you daily sin against Him, He daily loves You still.

### **Glorification**

Being known by God means that you will one day be delivered from this body of death (**Romans 7:24**). Although you will die, it will be out of God’s great love, He will finally free you from the sin and misery you have known your whole life, and He will bring you into perfect communion with His Son Jesus Christ (**Phil. 1:23**). On that day you will be received into Heaven (**Matthew 25:34**), openly acknowledged and acquitted of all charges against you (**Matthew 10:32**) filled with inconceivable joys (**Psalms 16:11**); made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul; and there God will be your God, and you will be one of His people for ever and ever for all eternity. That is what it means to be **known by God**.

### **The great hope of the Christian life**

So then how can we ever be swollen with pride over what we know? The great hope of the Christian life is not what we know, but that God knows us.

That's our **first point**. The knowledge that is puffed up is a knowledge without love. The cure to this *puffed up knowledge* is to meditate on the truth that God knows and loves you, even you. Though you are more sinful than you could possibly conceive, you are more loved in Christ Jesus than you can ever fathom.

## II. The Knowledge That Is Not Possessed By All

### Lego gods

Paul now goes on to affirm the basic theology of the stronger brother in Corinth. **v.4-5** “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.’ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords.’” The two vital truths that Paul is affirming is **1)** an idol is nothing and **2)** there is no God but one. He recognizes that the world says that there are many gods and many lords, but notice in **v.5** he calls them “so-called” gods. The Greek Word is *lego*. This is where the Lego company got its name. Originally a Danish company, the word Lego came from a Danish phrase meaning “to play well.” I don't believe Paul prophetically saw that this word would be used for a toy company, but it fits well here. The so-called gods in the heavens and earth are are but toys. In sweeping fashion, Paul is calling out everything polytheistic religion, whether it be Hinduism, or Mormonism, or Odinism. The gods that belong to these religions are but toys—*lego theos*—play gods.

### The Shema

Then he says this in **v.6** “...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.” Paul is borrowing this directly from the Shema. Remember we looked at that a few weeks ago from **Deuteronomy 6:4** “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This

was Israel's fundamental creedal statement. Faithful Jews down to this day pray the Shema in their morning and evening prayers. Paul now interprets it for us. This is the apostolic interpretation of the the Shema. Who is this one God? He is the Father, v.6 "...*from whom are all things and for whom we exist.*" Meaning the Father is the **Creator** of all things *and* the **Destiny** of all things. All of life is about Him from beginning to end.<sup>11</sup> Who is this one Lord? He is Lord Jesus Christ, end of v.6 "...*through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*" Meaning Jesus is the **Mediator** of creation, the Word that God spoke to create all things *and* the **Mediator** the new creation, the Word God sent to save His people.<sup>12</sup>

### The Nicene creed

Now the weight of what Paul is saying here might be missed on 21st century American Christians, but it wouldn't have been missed on 1st century Jews. By including Jesus in the Shema, Paul was unequivocally stating that Jesus was equal with God the Father. He would have affirmed every syllable of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,  
 the Father almighty,  
 maker of heaven and earth,  
 of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
 the only Son of God,  
 begotten from the Father before all ages,  
 God from God,  
 Light from Light,  
 true God from true God,

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<sup>11</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 383

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 384

begotten, not made;  
of the same essence as the Father.<sup>13</sup>

### **The truth about all reality!**

So again notice how bold Paul is! He is saying that any religion that denies that Jesus Christ is God Himself such as Judaism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, or any secular philosophies such as agnosticism and atheism are all lies. This is not only the fundamental article of the Christian faith, it is the fundamental fact of the universe. Christianity is not a private religion. It is truth with a capital T. As Francis Schaeffer once said:

“Christianity is not just a set of doctrines, even the right doctrines...When I say Christianity is true I mean it is true to total reality—the total of what is, beginning with the central reality, the objective existence of the personal infinite God. Christianity is not just a series of truths but *Truth*—Truth about all reality.”<sup>14</sup>

At this moment in time, not everyone believes that Jesus is Lord over all. But one day all people will confess that Jesus is Lord. **Philippians 2:10-11** “...at the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

### **A syllogism of idolatry**

The implication of this would have been clear to these stronger brothers in Corinth. We can put it in a syllogism

P1. All other so-called gods are false

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<sup>13</sup> Source: <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/nicene-creed> Accessed March 13, 2021

<sup>14</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Revised Edition, 1982), pg. 19-20

P2. Idols are representations of these so-called gods

∴ Idols are false

### Objective vs. Subjective Idolatry

That's why these stronger brothers could eat this meat sacrificed to idols. Paul completely agrees with them on this point.<sup>15</sup> But then he takes a surprising turn. Look at v.7 "However, not all possess this knowledge [Meaning the knowledge that idols aren't real]. But some, through former association with idols, eat food *as really offered to an idol*, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." There are two types of idolatry that Paul is dealing with: Objective Idolatry and Subjective Idolatry.<sup>16</sup> Regarding **Objective Idolatry**, there were some Christians in Corinth,<sup>17</sup> who were in fact participating in pagan feasts. They thought it was innocent enough, but they were *objectively* participating in idolatry. Paul speaks against that in **10:20**. But here, we see **Subjective Idolatry**. Nothing was wrong with the meat *itself*. There was nothing *objectively* wrong with eating. But because some of them were so entrenched in these pagan ceremonies before their conversion, they couldn't separate the worship from the eating. So for them to eat it was subjectively idolatrous. **Romans 14:23** "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kevin DeYoung distinguishes between "launching theology" and "landing theology" He says "Some doctrines represent different conclusions reached from basically the same premises. Other doctrines are starting points that set us on a wildly different trajectory. For example, the difference between postmillennialism and amillennialism is not a difference over first things. The two sides simply disagree how best to interpret a few disputed texts. It's a matter of landing theology. By contrast, the doctrine of Scripture (to give one example) is about launching theology. If we get that doctrine wrong, we are bound to mess up everything else." Source: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/where-and-how-do-we-draw-the-line/> Accessed March 13, 2021. Here Paul agrees with their "launching theology"—that there is only one God, but he disagrees with their "landing theology"—because they have no regard for their brothers in how they use this knowledge.

<sup>16</sup> Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 369

<sup>17</sup> the more *liberal* type

<sup>18</sup> Also v.14 "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean."

## **2nd principle: Not all Christians possess the same knowledge.**

So we come to our **second principle**: *Not all Christians possess the same knowledge*. These weaker brothers did not possess the same knowledge as their stronger brothers. Were they in error? Yes. But don't you see that's not Paul's main concern? His main concern was that these weaker brothers didn't defile their conscience. And that requires stronger brothers to recognize the correct knowledge is not always the main thing we should be concerned about. Case in point would be 2020. I'm sure that we as elders made some mistakes when it came to how to handle the issues of masking and social distancing and quarantining. This passage has weighed heavily on me all week because the issues here I believe speak to our situation. Some in the congregation decided to take every precaution possible, some decided to take no precautions at all, and some found a middle ground. We all have different knowledge. What should we have done? We attempted to have policies where all could act according to their conscience, so that no one would knowingly violate their conscience. That has been hard for many of us to accept. Paul's truism here that "...not all possess this knowledge" is difficult when you are so strongly on one side. But accept it we must. Beloved, there will be many more things that we disagree on. What will you do? To simply point to a Scripture and say '...see this is what it says' misses Paul's point entirely.

### **The strongest brother**

Paul is actually identifying three types of brothers in this text. The weaker brother, the stronger brother, and the strongest brother. It's the strongest brother who recognizes that not all possess the same knowledge. Unlike the stronger brother, the strongest brother doesn't require the weaker brother to agree with him. Instead, he recognizes the supreme importance of conscience and does what he can not to impose his practice on others. That's our **second point**.

### III. The Knowledge That Gives Preference and Protects

#### Does Paul contradict the Jerusalem Council?

Let's look at **v.8**. Interestingly enough this verse seems to create a problem with Scripture. Paul says "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do." The reason I say this verse seems to create a problem is because of Acts 15. Please turn there. Here the Jerusalem council—composed of the elders and apostles who were in Jerusalem at the time—is meeting because there were some Judaizers who were insisting that "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (**Acts 15:1**). So they discussed the pressing issue. They soundly rejected the need to be circumcised to be saved. However in their response letter they wrote to the Christians who asked the question, they said in **v.28** "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."<sup>19</sup> Note three things **1)** These requirements were directed by the Holy Spirit Himself. **2)** On the list of things to avoid was food sacrificed to idols. **3)** Paul was at that council. He spoke at it. He agreed with these things. And yet in **1 Corinthian 8:8** he says to eat any kind of food, sacrificed to idols or not, is a matter of indifference to God. Is Paul contradicting himself? No. In fact he's being perfectly consistent.

#### Christ was tender to them

The council's decision to tell them to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols was a rule motivated out of love. A temporary rule until the Church matured. Who was the early Church composed of? Jews who had spent 2,000 years being told to avoid such things, *and* Gentiles who were only recently delivered

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<sup>19</sup> Also see Revelation 2:14, 20

from such things. The meat sacrificed to idols wasn't the problem. They were. Their own hearts were not yet strengthened enough in the gospel, and the Holy Spirit understood this perfectly. It would have been a stumbling block to them. As Jonathan Edwards says here:

the Spirit of "...Christ dealt very tenderly with them in this point...[He] had many things to say [but] they could not yet bear them...[He] was gradual in revealing [these things]. He gave here a little and there a little as they could bear...Thus tender was [the Spirit of] Christ [with] the Church while [she] was an infant."<sup>20</sup>

Case in point, the Spirit of Christ didn't convince Peter that all foods were clean<sup>21</sup> until Acts 10—some nine years after Jesus resurrection<sup>22</sup>—though the Holy Spirit knew that Peter had this deficiency.

### **Paul calls us to be tender**

Now when Paul wrote this letter, some 25 years after the Resurrection, and he was laying down the *objective truth* that any meat (idol or no) doesn't affect your relationship with God one way or the other. However, he still desires to be tender to the flock of God who may not understand these things. And he calls us to that same spirit of tenderness. Look at v.9 "But *take care* [the only imperative in this passage] that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak." In other words, be watchful, be attentive, express deep concern, that your freedom doesn't wound others. As Paul said in **Romans 14:22** "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God." Don't flaunt

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pg. 100

<sup>21</sup> Though Jesus himself had already taught this in Mark 7:18-19 "Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled? (Thus he declared all foods clean.)"

<sup>22</sup> Source: [http://www.generationword.com/bible\\_school\\_notes/Timeline%20of%20Acts.htm](http://www.generationword.com/bible_school_notes/Timeline%20of%20Acts.htm)  
Accessed March 13, 2021

your freedom, don't flaunt your convictions, don't think that your mission in life is to make sure that every Christian ought to believe like you. That is the knowledge that puffs up. If you really are the stronger brother, you will know when it time to exercise your freedom, when it is time to abstain, and when it is time to simply be quite.

### **The crisis of a defiled conscience**

What's the consequence of not being tender towards your brother? **v. 10-11** "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple,<sup>23</sup> will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died." Paul uses the strongest language possible here: "this weak person is *destroyed*." Paul is not saying that the weak can lose their salvation. We know this because he says at the end of **v.11** that this brother is one "...for whom Christ died." By *destroyed* Paul means "defiled"—**v.7**; or "wound"—**v.12**; or "stumble"—**v.13**; or "grieve" in **Romans 14:15**.<sup>24</sup> When your conscience is wounded, you feel destroyed. Paul commands Timothy in **1 Timothy 1:19** to guard his conscience, because those who have not are likened to a shipwreck.<sup>25</sup>

### **Christian and his scroll**

Boys and girls, do you know that great pain involved in wounding your conscience?<sup>26</sup> In Pilgrim's Progress, after Christian was relieved of the burden on his back, he was given a roll, or a certificate that he took with him. And this

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<sup>23</sup> God-willing we will deal with this in chapter 10.

<sup>24</sup> Notice the parallelism: "For if your brother is *grieved* by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not *destroy* the one for whom Christ died."

<sup>25</sup> holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,

<sup>26</sup> What is your conscience? It is that part of your soul that bears witness to your thoughts, your words, and your actions (**Romans 2:15**). It has one job: it either tells you that you are acting righteously or unrighteously. It is the supreme court of the soul. It is not always right, yet it's ruling is final in this sense, that to go against it is subjectively sin, whether that sin is objective or no.

certificate symbolized his assurance of salvation. Whenever he was afraid, if he were but to study the roll, he could find comfort. But almost right after he received it, he grew very careless and through his own sin lost the roll. The next day, he became afraid because he met some travelers who warned him of the danger that lie ahead. He reached for his roll to find comfort in the promises of God, but it wasn't there. And it says that Christian was in great distress, he knew not what to do. He realized that he would have to travel backward to find it. All the way back, the sorrow overflowed out of his heart. Sometimes he sighed, sometimes he wept. Finally he cries out "O wretched man that I am... that I should so indulge in the flesh..."<sup>27</sup> Out of all the dangers that Christian faced, this internal wound to his conscience was the most painful. That is what it is like to wound your conscience.

### **They are united to Christ ∴ you are sinning against Him**

Dear congregation, Paul is saying that by our example we can lead others to wound their conscience in such a way. But once again he advances his argument. He says in v.12 "Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, *you sin against Christ.*" Paul reminds us of our union with Christ. When we sin against our brother, we sin against Christ because Christ is united to that brother. Charles Hodge puts it like this: "An injury done to a child is an injury to the parent...they are so united that the injury of the one is the injury of the other."<sup>28</sup> Do you see? To injure a child is to show that you don't care about her parent? The same it is with Christ. Christ and the believer are so united that "...whatever good or evil is done to them is done also to him."<sup>29</sup> Jesus said in **Matthew 25:40** "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

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<sup>27</sup> John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. 3*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 105

<sup>28</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 150

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 150

### **3rd principle: Christian liberty must be abandoned if they lead others to sin**

Therefore Paul gives his final principle in **v.13** “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” I love how the KJV puts it: “...if meat makes my brother [stumble] I will eat no flesh while the world standeth...” Here’s **the principle**: *we must forgo certain Christian liberties if they lead others to sin.* This doesn’t mean that we give up gospel liberty. The Jerusalem council refused to bow the knee to the Judaizers and require circumcision. But it does mean that we must be willing to give up certain Christian liberties, those indifferent things, if we know those things will harm your brother. Keep those things between yourself and God. Martin Luther put it like this: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Experimental knowledge<sup>31</sup>**

So how can you be a servant in your use of Christian knowledge? Which things ought you to be careful about? **First**, remember Paul already said “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful” (1 **Cor. 6:12**). Don’t stop at asking: ‘Does God allow me to do (fill in the blank) activity?’ Go further. Ask: ‘Will this be helpful and useful for my brothers and sisters?’ **Secondly**, Paul says in 1 **Timothy 4:12** “...set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Ask yourself: ‘Am I setting an example that others can follow, especially my weaker brothers and sisters?’ Thirdly, **Romans 12:10** says “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” Ask yourself: “Am I outdoing others in the honor I am showing them? Or am I only concerned about my honor, my liberty, my knowledge? **Finally**, can you see that your brother or sister is united to the

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<sup>30</sup> Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.,: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. 208

<sup>31</sup> Much help from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 197

Lord Jesus Christ? Will Jesus be worshipped or abused by your behavior towards your fellow believer?

### **Come O Come Thou Holy Spirit**

We're going to sing "Come, O Come, Thou Holy Spirit." May these words be the prayer of your heart as you sing them:

Come, O come, Thou Holy Spirit, light and life Thy grace impart  
Blessed Source of consolation guide our minds and fill our hearts  
Grant my mind and my affections wisdom, counsel, purity  
That I may be ever seeking only that which pleases Thee  
Only that which pleases thee

