

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

8 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ²If anyone supposes that he knows something, he does not yet know the way he ought to know. ³But if anyone loves God, this person has been known by him.

⁴So, concerning the eating of food from idol sacrifices, we know that an idol is not anything real in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵Indeed, even if there are so-called “gods,” whether in the heavens or on earth (as in fact there are many “gods” and many “lords”), ⁶nevertheless for us there is one God—the Father, from whom all things exist and we exist for him—and one Lord—Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and we exist through him.

⁷However, that knowledge is not in everyone. Instead some, who are still affected by their former habit with the idol, eat the food as something sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

⁸Food will not bring us closer to God. We do not lack anything if we do not eat, nor are we better off if we do. ⁹And be careful that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if someone sees you, a person who has knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of this man, weak as he is, be emboldened to eat food from an idol sacrifice? ¹¹You see, the weak person is being destroyed by your knowledge—the brother for whose sake Christ died! ¹²And when you sin in this way against your brothers and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I do not cause my brother to sin.

Get a Life

I.

It has been a crucial part of culture for thousands of years, really from the dawn of mankind. It signifies a kind of bond. I’m talking about sitting down for a meal. Think of all the events—in ancient times, recorded in the Bible, and in modern days—in which a meal is important.

Naturally the special events come quickly to mind. Brides and grooms have put off their weddings over this past year because they felt that the wedding reception was such a big part of their special day. Smaller gatherings are no less important; maybe they’re even *more* important in some ways. There are Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter meals with family. Friends gather to celebrate graduations, confirmations, or just picnics to get together with friends for a Fourth of July barbeque. Sometimes the get-together is nothing more than to meet a friend for lunch. At times, the smallest of the gatherings can be the most important; you have an opportunity to talk about things that are of great importance to your life.

Biblical meals come to mind that took on huge importance. Think of the feeding of the 4,000 and the feeding of the 5,000. These were opportunities for Jesus to display who he really was to people. There was the Passover, begun when God told Moses that he would finally lead the nation of Israel out of captivity in Egypt. While each family was gathering individually in small groups, it was a meal the whole nation participated in. Eventually Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper during the celebration of the Passover with his disciples.

Every culture had and has festival meals in which people bond together.

This was no less crucial in the city of Corinth. The concept of bonding was part of the religious meal worshipers would eat in their temples. A sacrifice would be made to the idol, and the eating of a meal would be part of that worship—even the central or bonding or covenanting act. It was considered a sacred religious act. Food sacrificed to the idol meant that you were connected with everything that idol stood for.

What happened in the temple, though, was that only *part* of the animal sacrificed was eaten in that supposedly sacred meal. Another part was burned up as the sacrifice to the idol. There was a third part. The third part was given to the priests who served in that particular idol’s temple. The priests typically couldn’t use all the meat themselves, but it made a convenient source of revenue.

What they did not use, they sold to various stores in the marketplace.

Plenty of meat came to the store in this way. There was no need for a special slaughterhouse or butcher shop. What was needed for sales to their customers came in from the temples. Everyone knew it. Everyone accepted it. It just was the way things were.

Many Christians in Corinth were converts from idol worship. Some of those Corinthian converts to Christianity had a problem with marketplace meat. They knew what was going on there. They had abandoned worship of false gods. They didn't want to buy or eat tainted meat. They didn't want to be connected to or bonded with false gods any more. They were concerned that buying and eating such meat would compromise their Christianity.

Others were not concerned at all. "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge...⁴So, concerning the eating of food from idol sacrifices, we know that an idol is not anything real in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵Indeed, even if there are so-called 'gods,' whether in the heavens or on earth (as in fact there are many 'gods' and many 'lords')" (1 Corinthians 8:1, 4-5, EHV). Those not concerned about eating food sacrificed to idols had knowledge. They understood that those idols were not really gods. As such, the sacrifices were not really sacrifices at all. Those gods could do nothing to help people. They were useless.

"However, that knowledge is not in everyone. Instead some, who are still affected by their former habit with the idol, eat the food as something sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled" (1 Corinthians 8:7, EHV). Here was the problem. Some of those Christians had a weak conscience. They thought it was sin to buy and eat such meat from the marketplace. They thought it would restore the false bond to the idol they had once had. It made them doubt their faith in the true God.

"Be careful that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.¹⁰For if someone sees you, a person who has knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of this man, weak as he is, be emboldened to eat food from an idol sacrifice? ¹¹You see, the weak person is being destroyed by your knowledge—the brother for whose sake Christ died!" (1 Corinthians 8:9-11, EHV). The problem went even deeper. Sometimes an invitation would be sent out to go to dinner at an idol temple. Those who had knowledge and understood it was really nothing might accept the invitation. If they were seen by a weak Christian, that weaker Christian might accept such an invitation and violate his own conscience. Wouldn't it be sad if just accepting an invitation to dinner would cause a person to stumble and fall from faith?

II.

Certainly there are places today where the same kind of sacrifices are made. In our particular corner of the world they are so rare as to be non-existent.

There are still idols, though, aren't there? And there are still bonding activities to that idol. Are any of your bonding activities causing problems for those weak in faith? Your music choices, perhaps. Maybe the "idol" or "hero" of our time in music or sport. I suppose even idols of politics or some other area of pop culture and the almost religious devotion that figure inspires.

It could be that there are instances, even today, when accepting an invitation to a meal might cause a problem for some other Christian with a weak conscience. The person who has been struggling to overcome a gambling addiction who sees you going to dinner at the casino. The dinner party you attended (or hosted) at which *everyone* seemed to overindulge in alcohol.

"Be careful that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak...¹¹You see, the weak person is being destroyed by your knowledge" (1 Corinthians 8:9, 11, EHV).

In the Second Lesson two weeks ago we touched on adiaphora—things neither commanded nor forbidden by God—things that a person can choose to do or use in Christian freedom. There were, however, some guardrails. Those things or activities should not be harmful, especially spiritually. Also, those things should not control the Christian; one shouldn't become addicted to them. Harming someone *else* spiritually would be a tragedy.

III.

“Indeed, even if there are so-called ‘gods,’ whether in the heavens or on earth (as in fact there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), ‘nevertheless for us there is one God—the Father, from whom all things exist and we exist for him—and one Lord—Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and we exist through him” (1 Corinthians 8:5-6, EHV).

There are many “so-called ‘gods,’” as Paul says. Translate that into the language of today. There are many things people *treat* like gods, even if they don’t call them gods. They are the things they focus all their attention on and devote many of their resources to.

There is only one true God—the Triune God. We know him. As Paul says, he created the universe. Everything we are and have comes from the true God. There is one Lord, Paul says, Jesus Christ. Notice that Paul identifies him as the One True God. Jesus was present and active in creation. He is one of the persons of the Triune God.

Our existence is made compete in Jesus. Jesus didn’t just create us and leave us to fend for ourselves. When sin entered the world, God announced his plan to do something about it. Sacrifices of lambs and bulls and goats and calves weren’t enough to make any difference. Eating meals with such sacrificed animals didn’t create the necessary bond.

Jesus *himself* was offered as the sacrifice. He died for us all. He offers himself in the special meal he instituted so we could continue to come together and bond, being strengthened again and again in remembrance of what he has done for us and gives us through faith in him.

IV.

“Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Corinthians 8:1, EHV).

You know about things sacrificed to idols. The rituals, the meals, the get-togethers.

No doubt many of them are harmless. Perhaps to someone with a weak conscience, however, that “harmless” fun might tear down faith.

“Therefore, if food causes my brother to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I do not cause my brother to sin” (1 Corinthians 8:13, EHV).

I suppose Jesus could have chosen to use his freedom to say: “I’ll stay in heaven and not worry about people in need of forgiveness.” He could have...but he didn’t. He came to earth and he did what we needed to have done.

Now we have the opportunity to choose carefully. We can choose not to assert our rights, but in love to choose what will help our brother or sister to not stumble in sin. As Jesus has sacrificed himself for us, we have an opportunity to sacrifice our rights for others.

In Corinth, people were eating foods in an idol temple thinking that was the way to get a life. Our God, the living God, promises us a real life. He nourishes us in that life. With the life you have been given in Christ, feel free to eat all that is set before you in this world. With the life you have been given in Christ, feel free to set aside those things that might be damaging to another.

Live in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the living God—the only true God. Go, for this God, and this God alone, has given you a life. Amen.