

1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Paul Instructs What True Knowledge Is

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The Situation In 1 Corinthians 8

- The Corinthians were boasting in sophia, logos, and gnosis. These three were supreme indicators of being “spiritual.”
- The Corinthians believed gnosis “built them up” so that they had the right to eat anything – including food sacrificed to idols.
- In their boasting of gnosis, and their exercising of their rights to eat, they caused weaker brothers/sisters to stumble.
- Paul corrects the situation by explaining that true gnosis leads to loving others.

They Don't Know As They Ought To Know

1 Cor 8:1-3 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

Edifies = οικοδομew “build up” (8:10)

1 Cor 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.

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Ought to know = οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι "he has not yet known just as he must know"

- Paul is not denigrating knowledge; rather, he is explaining what true knowledge is. True knowledge leads to loving brothers and sisters and not tempting them to stumble.

Paul Returns To Their Letter

1 Cor 8:4-6 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

1. This section sets up verse 7 "...not all men have this knowledge."
2. This section anticipates the qualification in 10:19-20 The idols are not gods, but they are access to demons!

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From whom = εκ ου – source of all things
 "Through" whom = δια ου - mediator of all things

~~Not All Men Know Idols Are Nothing~~

1 Cor 8:7-9 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

“they eat as if it were idol food” – present tense “eating”

- The lack of the past tense “sacrificed” (actually an adjective) indicates that it is very likely that the Corinthians were eating the food in the temple, not in the market place sometime later.

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Food = Paul says of food here what he says elsewhere of circumcision (cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15).

1 Cor 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God.

- Paul again is agreeing with their slogan in the letter, but qualifies it. The Corinthian “authority” (ἐξουσία) supposedly came from their gnosis. Paul reminds them they cannot use their gnosis and liberty to cause a weaker brother or sister to stumble. (This is why 9:1-23)

~~The Weaker Brother Sees And Stumbles~~

1 Cor 8:10-13 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

Dining in an idol’s temple = This indicates that here and in 10:1-22, the issue was one where those who claimed “gnosis” were partaking in the temple feasts. The weaker brother/sister saw them, and sinned because they could not truly believe and idol was nothing.

Freedom Can Ruin Another

1 Cor 8:11-13 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

Ἀπολλύται = present, passive: The present tense indicates he is already experiencing ruin.

Ἀσθενῶν = present, active, participle: Indicating a present state and continuation of weakness. "One who is continually weak."

Gordon Fee On Application

- (1) The issue is not that of "offending" someone in the church. It has to do with conduct that another would "emulate"—indeed, in this case apparently is being urged to emulate—to his or her own hurt.
- (2) Usually this principle is invoked in more peripheral matters of behavior. But that, too, is not the case here. While it is true that in v. 13 Paul broadens the scope considerably, the specific issue is something that he will eventually forbid altogether. Nonetheless, the greater issues for him in this section—the attitudinal ones—do need careful hearing: people arguing for behavior on the basis of knowledge and asserting their "authority/freedom" to the detriment of others.

(3) What would seem to be an illegitimate use of the principle, even in the broader terms of v. 13, is for those who feel "offended" to try to force all others to conform to their own idiosyncrasies of behavior. Paul makes it quite clear in Rom. 14 that on matters of indifference people within any given community should learn to live together in harmony, with no group demanding their own behavior of the others.

(4) The real concern of the passage needs a regular hearing in the church. Personal behavior is dictated not by knowledge, freedom, or law, but by love for those within the community of faith. Everything one does that affects relationships within the body of Christ should have care for brothers and sisters as its primary motivation.
