

1 CORINTHIANS 8

Knowledge vs. Love

Intro: having addressed their questions and issues regarding marriage, Paul moved on to another matter the Corinthians had brought up in their letter to him: meat sacrificed to idols. This topic will be addressed over chapters 8 - 10.

THE ISSUE: MEAT SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

1. This was a relevant issue in Corinth for two reasons:
 - » Eating meat in an idol's temple was prevalent not only for religious reasons, but for civil reasons. "• The kind of occasion, public or private, when people were likely to come together socially was the kind of occasion when a sacrifice was appropriate. To have nothing to do with such gatherings was to cut oneself off from most social intercourse with one's fellows." (Leon Morris) Public festivals, religious celebrations in the temples might well be the only occasion when the poor could obtain meat. Paul addresses this matter specifically in 8.10; 10.14-22.
 - » Most meat available in the markets had been sacrificed to idols. "Part of the victim was always offered on the altar to the god, part went to the priests, and usually part to the worshippers. The priests customarily sold what they could not use. It would often be very difficult to know for sure whether meat in a given shop had been part of a sacrifice or not." (Leon Morris) Paul addresses this matter specifically in 10.23-30.
2. The difficult social circumstances in Corinth were compounded by the attitude of some brethren, those who boasted in their knowledge, knowledge that might wound the conscience of their brethren.
3. Outline of chapters 8-10

- » Their "knowledge" contrasted with love (chapter 8)
- » Paul's example of forsaking liberty (chapter 9)
- » The issues addressed directly (chapter 10)
 - Eating in an idol's temple (10.1-22)
 - Eating meat sold in the market place (10.23-33)

VSS. 1-6, THEIR KNOWLEDGE

1. It is clear from this section that some of the brethren in Corinth boasted of superior knowledge when it came to meat sacrificed to idols. Their knowledge is summarized in vss. 4-6. They knew that there were no such things as "idols". Yes, the heathen worshipped many gods and lords (shorthand for idols), but those were nothing. There is only one God and one Lord.
2. Paul doesn't discount their knowledge, but there was a deficiency in their knowledge: love! Their knowledge had made them arrogant towards their brethren, but love would edify!
3. Paul uses strong irony in vss. 2-3. They supposed that they had "knowledge", but since they didn't have love they did not know "as he ought to know." Furthermore, if they would focus on loving God (and by extension, others), they would be known by God! They may have known that the idols were not God, but the truly important thing was to be known by God, and that was only possible when they loved Him and their brethren.

VSS. 7-12, THE EFFECT OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE ON OTHERS

1. There were some without knowledge (vs. 7). Some of the Christians in Corinth had been converted out of idolatry. They may have the mental knowledge that idols were not real, but

the practice of eating in an idols temple, or eating meat sacrificed to idols was so associated with their former lives, to do so would be against their conscience, and thus wrong.

2. The relative unimportance of food (vs. 8).
Some Christians in Corinth may have thought that eating in the temples only showed their superior knowledge, their utter disregard for the idols. But Paul reminds them that the eating of meat is ultimately meaningless.
3. However, their “liberty” (i.e. the exercise of their knowledge in eating meat in the temples) could do great damage to their brethren (vss. 9-12)
 - » Their liberty could be a stumbling block to the “weak.” Paul uses this term accommodatively. He is not implying that their spiritually inferior, only that in the matter of eating meat sacrificed to idols their conscience was weak.
 - » Note: Paul does not condemn them for eating in the temples of idols in this passage, but he will rebuke the practice in chapter 10. For now, Paul is only addressing their sinful attitude, not the sinful practice.
 - » Vss. 11-12 served as a powerful warning to these brethren. Their attitudes could lead to brethren violating their conscience. Their attitude could lead a brother into sin! Their attitude could destroy those for whom Christ died! We would do well to apply the same warning to the supposed liberties of our day (drinking, dancing, clothing, etc.)

PAUL’S RESOLVE (VS. 13).

1. Paul was willing to forgo meat if it meant sparing a brother. He will delve further into his own attitude in chapter 9.
2. But Paul’s statement in vs. 13 was meant to challenge these arrogant brethren. Would they be willing to forgo a liberty for the sake of their brethren?
3. Would we?