

“Lest I Make My Brother to Offend”

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

There are times we may say we have a right to do something, and that may be true, but if it causes someone else to stumble in their walk with the Lord then our right ends where their walk begins. The Apostle Paul sums it up in the last verse of our text. After it is all said and done, we should never do anything if we know that it will cause trouble in another believer’s life, whether we have “the right” to do it or not.

There are things that are clearly right and good to do all the time, as found in Scripture: i.e., reading the Bible, praying, witnessing, giving, working, loving, etc. There are also things clearly defined in Scripture as being wrong all the time (reference the 10 Commandments, for instance). Then there are what some call “gray areas” – that is what this text addresses.

This text begins with an answer to another question that the church had in Corinth. The first had to do with marriage and sexual immorality; this one has to do with “the limitations of Christian liberty,” as Dr. Scofield titles it.

We must first address the background of the question, since it’s doubtful that any of us here have had to face anything like what was faced in the life of the new converts in Corinth.

The questions came to Paul out of a difference of opinion in the church about whether or not it was permissible for a Christian to eat food that had been sacrificed to some god. Most people today, unless they have spent time in the remote areas of one of the world's undeveloped countries, have not

been exposed to any form of worship that includes the sacrifice of animals, although it was an everyday experience for first-century Christians. There were several situations in which a Christian might be asked to eat this meat that had been offered to one of the gods. He might be invited by a friend to a special meal at the temple, an event that might have no great religious significance. There were many in those days who no longer believed in the existence of the gods, but who continued to participate in some of the festivals at the temple for social reasons. Or a Christian might be invited to have dinner in the home of a neighbor or friend who was not a Christian, in which case he could almost be assured that the meat served was from an animal that had been dedicated to one of the gods. Or even in his own home, when a Christian sat down to a meal prepared in his own kitchen he could never be sure that the meat his wife had purchased at the corner market had not been sacrificed to some idol.

Before looking at the two sides in the church that represented different positions on eating meat offered to idols, we ought at least to mention the one thing on which they were all agreed: that it is a sin to worship idols. The insistence that God's children should have no other gods before them was the theme of the Old Testament prophets, and that same insistence was assumed in the preaching of the first century. Those who became Christians had no question about the necessity to break away from the religious implications of idolatry. But the whole of society was permeated with the social implications of the worship of pagan gods, and it was at this point that the questions began to arise.

It was this situation that precipitated the question

to Paul about whether or not it was a sin for a Christian to eat meat offered to an idol. For one group in the church the practice raised no question. Though they may have had a pagan background, they were so strong in their belief that there was but one God and that He had revealed Himself in Jesus Christ that they did not view the gods to which people sacrificed animals as having any reality. The idols were now just so many pieces of wood or stone or metal. While they might not accept an invitation to dine at the temple, they saw absolutely nothing wrong with eating meat that had been offered to one of the idols in the home of a friend or in their own homes. Not only was their conscience clear, but they had almost a spirit of condescension toward the church members who did not agree with them.

A second group had a more difficult time handling the whole situation. They were also converts to Christianity who had come to faith in Jesus Christ out of a background of paganism. But they had been seriously involved in the worship of idols and in the various ceremonies surrounding that practice, including the meals in the temple. When they became Christians they accepted as true the fact that there is but one God and that the idols that had been a part of their previous life were nothing. But while they could accept this in their minds, at an emotional level they had problems. Even though they knew that the gods to whom the meat had been offered were not real, every time they ate the meat they felt guilty. They began to wonder if feeling guilty didn't mean that what they were doing was a sin, and they articulated their fears within the church. (The Preacher's Commentary, edited by Lloyd Ogilvie)

With that understood, we come to the point of it all

– how do we, as a believer, deal with life in a pagan world and still both maintain our testimony and make sure we are not contributing to the loss of a weaker brother or sister’s testimony, all the while helping them grow in their faith and their relationship with the Lord?

I. LOVE IS THE FORM – VS. 1-3

A. Charity (the sacrificial giving of ourselves to others – love) is the form by which our actions are framed – knowledge is to be used to make the charity effective.

1. It’s not what we know that has influence on others but how much we show that we care (“charity”).
2. Far too often the knowledge one has as it relates to their walk with the Lord and their understanding of biblical things is a catalyst for arrogancy and a lack of compassion and empathy for those that don’t have what they have in knowledge. That attitude needs to be tempered with love – if done, then we can help impart knowledge rather than get in the way of it.

B. Vs. 1 – “we know that we all have knowledge” – Paul is simply stating that he (and his team), as well as those strong believers in the church of Corinth, all had an understanding of the nature of idols and the meat offered to them.

1. The word "know" in the first phrase - "we know" - is the Greek word *εἶδω*, which means to see - to be aware of, to perceive,

to understand. They were saying that "we" - the Corinthians and Apostle Paul and his team, were well aware of, understood completely, the issue at hand.

We admit; we cannot dispute; it is so plain a case that no one can be ignorant on this point. (Barnes)

2. "That we all have knowledge" – the second reference to "know," or, as here, "knowledge," is the Greek word γνῶσις

a) "Present and fragmentary knowledge as contrasted with ἐπίγνωσις (G1922), clear and exact knowledge which expresses a more thorough participation in the object or knowledge on the part of the knowledgeable subject." (Zodhiates)

b) γνῶσις – γνώση – knowledge, cognition, awareness, learning, cognizance, sense

c) Cognate: gnōsis

(1) A feminine noun derived from ginōskō, "experientially know" – functional ("working") knowledge gleaned from first-hand (personal) experience, connecting theory to application; "application-knowledge," gained in (by) a direct relationship.

(2) gnōsis ("applied-knowledge") is only as accurate (reliable) as the relationship it derives from. For example, the Gnostics boasted of their "applied knowledge" gained by their personal spiritual experiences – and it was (is) disastrous!

["Gnosticism" is literally, "the cult based on having special, personal knowledge" (1108 /gnósis).] Copyright © 1987, 2011 by Helps Ministries, Inc.

That is, on this subject; we are acquainted with the true nature of idols, and of idol worship; we all esteem an idol to be nothing, and cannot be in danger of being led into idolatry, or into any improper views in regard to this subject by participating of the food and feasts connected with idol worship This is the statement and argument of the Corinth0ians. (Barnes)

C. He then brings the focus to the real issue at hand – that of "charity" – love and compassion for others – putting the needs of others, in this case, the spiritual growth need of a weaker believer, in front of ones own perceived rights or freedoms.

1. "Knowledge puffeth up"

- a) The word for "puffeth" means to blow or to inflate and is always used to demonstrate pride. The word is used 7 times in the New Testament (four of which we have already studied previously in this book) and all but one (Col. 2:18) are found in First Corinthians.
- b) Knowledge by itself, without any qualifier, will only demonstrate a person's look at themselves – its intent is to simply "puff up" the persons standing, either perceived or real.

[Isaiah 5:21](#)

²¹ Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Romans 12:16

¹⁶ Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

2. "But charity edifieth" – or, love builds up

a) Agape – love demonstrated by action

b) "Edifieth" - comes from two words – one means a house, the other "a builder" – or literally to be a house builder, to construct – charity builds one up with a solid foundation.

D. Vs. 2 – without the qualifier of charity (love) in the work of Christ there is no real value to the knowledge one has. If all we do is come to church to learn more and never do anything with that knowledge, then we really don't know anything at all.

1. If we think we know it all, if we think we have arrived, if we think that we are smarter, or better, or more blessed than someone else, well, we don't really know anything at all – yet.

Galatians 6:3

³ For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

1 Timothy 1:5-7

⁵ Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

⁶ From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling;

⁷ Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

1 Timothy 6:3-4

³ If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

⁴ He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

2. Paul warned that if anyone thinks he or she has fully mastered any subject he or she can count on the fact that he or she has not. The reason for this is that there is always more to any subject than any one person ever appreciates. There is always another facet to it, another point of view that one has not considered when examining it, or more information about it.

“True gnosis [“knowledge”] consists not in the accumulation of so much data, nor even in the correctness of one’s theology, but in the fact that one has learned to live in love toward all.” (Gordon Fee, as quoted from “Constable’s Notes” in the NET Bible)

“The distinction which it seems that these rather cumbersome clauses seek to express is between, on the one hand, the collection of pieces of information (gnosis) about God, and, on the other, the state of being personally, and rightly, related to

him.” (Barret, as quoted from “Constable’s Notes” in the NET Bible)

“A famous preacher used to say, ‘Some Christians grow; others just swell.’” (Warren Weirsbe, as quoted from “Constable’s Notes” in the NET Bible))

E. Vs. 3 goes to the foundation of all love – the love God has for us, and, as the text demonstrates, the love we have for God. All love is based on this – all love is framed, is formed, by this.

1. “But if any man love God”

a) The “but” stands as a contrast to what is before – knowledge without love will show to those around us that we don’t really love God, at least not in action.

b) “If any man love God” – “which is the highest and noblest kind of love, the *source* of brotherly love, 1 John 5:2” (Alford).

[1 John 5:2](#)

² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

2. “The same is known of him” (of God)

a) “The same” – the one that loves God, and demonstrates that by loving his fellow believer, and by showing that love by not being a hinderance to his walk with the Lord, as will be seen later in this text.

b) “Is known” (ἐγνωσται – perfect passive indicative)

- (1) *Perfect tense - In Greek corresponds to the perfect tense in English, and describes an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated. Jesus' last cry from the cross, TETELESTAI ("It is finished!") is a good example of the perfect tense used in this sense, namely "It [the atonement] has been accomplished, completely, once and for all time."*
- (2) *Passive voice - Represents the subject as being the recipient of the action.*
- (3) *Indicative mood - a simple statement of fact - something has occurred.*
- c) "Of him" - of God - God loves us even if we don't show we love Him, but for those that do show their love for Him by their charitable actions towards others, then that is a very real, clear, demonstrative way for the world around us to see that we are known of God - that is to say, that we are truly born again by the Spirit of God. The tense of the "is known" shows this clearly.

Conclusion: Love is the form - how are we at loving, at being charitable?

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴ Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

⁵ Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

⁶ Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

⁷ Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,

endureth all things.

No better illustration can be given than this.

II. THE LORD IS THE FOUNDATION – VS. 4-6

A. The basic biblical teaching that there is one God and one Lord, as opposed to the many gods of the heathen (and, in particular, the Corinthians) is the foundation upon which the Christian life is built.

B. Vs. 4 and 5 demonstrate that the world considers there to be many gods (and that was very true in Corinth, as we have seen throughout our study of the book), but the believer knows there is only One.

1. Vs. 4 – “we know” – again, this is something that was understood by both the Apostle and his team, as well as the leadership (and mature saints) of the church at Corinth.
 - a) “That an idol is nothing in the world” – to the spiritual believer, this is fact. But to either an unbeliever or a new convert and/or immature believer, there is a very real connection between their idol worship and their faith and we need to help them get to the same level of knowledge we have on the subject.
 - b) It would seem, however, that the more immature believers, and/or new converts, had not developed such knowledge yet.
 - c) One thing this teaches us is that not everyone develops spiritually at the same level or rate, and we need to be careful we

don't criticize or condemn a fellow believer for their lack of knowledge on any given subject, even one that seems to be so obvious.

2. Vs. 5 makes both the foundational scriptural view clear, as well as a simple fact of existence – there is really and truly only one God. Not one that matters, not one that is all-powerful, but very simply put, there is only one and it is the God of the Bible – as Daniel put it, the “God of heaven.” It is of no real consequence if people don't believe in Him, or if they believe in another god, or no god at all – does not change the fact.

C. Vs. 6 sets the foundational principle of the church and its function – there is only one God, in three Persons (two seen here in the Father and the Son).

1. “But to us” – compared to the view of the world and its many gods – to the true believer (and especially the mature believer) there is only one true God.
 - a) “But” – yet, nonetheless
 - b) “TO US” – “emphatic: however that matter may be, we hold” (Alford)
2. “There is but one God” – again, a comparison to the many gods of the world (and, in part, pointing to the fact that there is one God, whether man believes so or not).

Malachi 2:10

¹⁰ Have we not all one father? hath not one

God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

John 17:3

3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

3. "The Father" – that is His name to the believer today – that is His function to us

Ephesians 4:6

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

4. "Of whom are all things"

a) An important point needs to be made here regarding the relationship between Father and Son, two Persons of the Trinity: comparing Scripture with Scripture, this text demonstrates that the two are One – what is said of the Father here is said of the Son in other texts, and since there are no contradictions of Scripture, this must mean more than what appears in the text. This is a contrast between idolatry and worship of the one true God – and to show that that Godhead has multiple perspectives and purposes.

Colossians 1:15–17

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

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:

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

- b) "Of" – "ek" – out of, as opposed to "eis," into something – shows the source of being
- c) "Are all things" – one word in the Greek – a totality or the whole

5. "And we in him" (or for Him)

- a) "In" (εἰς) – "with the primary idea of motion into any place or thing...the antithesis is expressed by 'ek,' out of"
- b) "Him" – for His purposes, to serve at His will

1 Corinthians 6:13

¹³ Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.

- c) As opposed to serving the old idols and gods they used to serve, they were to grow in the knowledge of the one true God and serve Him – not out of fear but out of love.

6. "And one Lord Jesus Christ" – some (Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance) say that this text, as well as others, show that Jesus Christ was not God – that is not what this is saying – again, the Bible cannot contradict itself.

- a) The term "Lord" is the New Testament equivalent to the Septuagint for Jehovah, and the Apostle Paul makes it the customary designation of Jesus (Preacher's

Homiletics) – 1 Tim. 2:5-6

1 Timothy 2:5–6

⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

⁶ Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

- b) Adonai - A Divine name, translated "Lord," and signifying, from its derivation, "sovereignty." Its vowels are found in the Masoretic Text with the unpronounceable tetragrammaton "YHWH"; and when the Hebrew reader came to these letters, he always substituted in pronunciation the word " 'adonay." Its vowels combined with the tetragrammaton form the word "Yahweh (Yahweh)"... Thus Jehovah was obtained by adding the vowels of Adonai to the consonants of YHWH. (Bibliography Information - Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'ADONAI'". "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". 1915.)
- c) Many English translations of the Bible translate the Tetragrammaton as LORD, following the Jewish practice of substituting Adonai for it.[13] In the same sense as the substitution of Adonai, the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible to Greek mainly used the word Kyrios (Greek: Κύριος, meaning 'lord') for YHWH.[14] The Apostle Paul was likely familiar with the use of the term Kyrios in the Septuagint and used it in his letters to refer to Jesus, thus signifying his divinity.
- d) As usual, the "Father" is called "God," yet not so as to exclude the Son from Godhead,

any more than to call the Son "Lord" excludes the Father from Lordship. N.B. 8.—The term [the unity of God] is used only by analogy. Though there is one "Divine nature, the unity of God is not a unity of kind, because there are not individuals of the same species, and therefore, as for other reasons, the word is inapplicable to the Divinity. Of all other objects of thought we can imagine fellows or reproductions. But in God there is absolute soleness—SOLEITAS; though what lies hidden in the mystery of this essential ONENESS we know but partially. It is wrong to dogmatise upon the nature of a unity to which we have no parallel, and which we cannot define by comparison or illustration" (Pope, Compend. Theol., i. 258). This unity not to be so emphasised as to reduce the Unity to three manifestations of the One God, successive but in different modes—Sabellianism. Paul is still so far a Jew that, speaking in the presence of heathen idolatries and of Jewish sensitiveness, his language is coloured by the Monotheism in which he had been trained from early boyhood. Yet "Lord" is the New Testament appropriation of the LXX. equivalent for Jehovah, and he, above all others, makes it the customary designation of Jesus of Nazareth, his risen Master. (Preacher's Homiletical commentary)

John 10:30

30 I and my Father are one.

John 20:27-28

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but

believing.

²⁸ And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

Philippians 2:9–11

⁹ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

e) Many false religions and cults base their beliefs on a few vague texts rather than building their beliefs on the preponderance of evidence and/or the very clear, precise texts. These foundational truths are something we all need to know – whether we are mature saints or new converts/immature saints – this is primary.

7. “By whom are all things”

a) In contrast to the “of whom are all things” said of the Father – He was the source – out of Him all things began.

b) In the Person of the Lord, Jesus Christ (God

the Son) all things were made – He’s the hands that formed man in the Garden of Eden, for instance.

John 1:1-3

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² The same was in the beginning with God.

³ All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Hebrews 1:2

² Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

c) The notes in the Geneva Bible say this: This word "by" does not signify the instrumental cause, but the efficient: for the Father and the Son work together, which is not so to be taken that we make two causes, seeing they have both but one nature, though they are distinct persons.

8. "And we by him" – this points not just to our physical creation, physical life, but also to our second "birth," to redemption, to the price paid for our pardon – we live eternally because of Him.

"We are redeemed by him from sin, Satan, the law, death, and hell; we are by him what we are, as Christians, as believers in him; by him, and from him, we have all the grace and the supplies of it we have; by him we have access to the Father, and

fellowship with him; by him we are governed, influenced, protected, and preserved to his kingdom and glory; and by him we are, and shall be, saved with an everlasting salvation.” (John Gill)

Romans 5:11

¹¹ And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Revelation 5:9–10

⁹ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

¹⁰ And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Conclusion to part 2: There is only one God, and one true faith. The world would like us to believe that there are many ways to God, and many ways to eternity with Him. They say that, in the end, all (especially those that are basically good) will make it. That, of course, is not true. And this text has demonstrated that for us.

The purpose of this entire text is to help the church at Corinth – both the mature and immature believers – become better at serving the one true God. They had, for the most part, been servants of false gods and proved themselves worthy proponents – it was not time they turned that into use for the Master.

What about us? How are we at serving the one true God? Are we just pew-warmers on Sunday and consider that the extent of our service? What motivates you in life? What is your primary driving force?

III. LIBERTY IS THE FUNCTION – vs. 7-13