

Chapter 8

Don't Misuse Your Knowledge

Introduction

The concern about eating meat offered to idols, a practice common in their culture, raises the issue that arrogant knowledge is insufficient and must be governed by love that builds others up, not encouraging another to sin.

Knowledge Makes One Arrogant Without the Medium of Love

Verse 1—The issue is now *concerning things* (Περὶ δὲ is a transition into a new section of the letter) *sacrificed to idols*.

- Specifically, that would be eating meat while being offered at pagan temple worship (verse 4) *eating of things sacrificed to idols*.
- In the greater context of the New Testament, eating food sacrificed to idols was sin if it was associated with practicing idolatry.
 - (1) The Council at Jerusalem of apostles and elders concluded that new Gentile converts *abstain from things contaminated by idols* (Acts 15:19).
 - (2) Some 50 years later in the 90s, the Apostle John, evaluating the churches of Asia, wrote to Pergamum, “*I have a few things against you...you eat things sacrificed to idols*” and to Thyatira “*I have this against you...you eat things offered to idols.*”
 - (3) Paul wrote *the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God and I do not want you to become sharers in demons* (1 Corinthians 10:20).
- Yet, believers *know that we all have knowledge* that there are no other gods besides the One True God. So, they knew meat offered to idols was intrinsically nothing.
- However, *knowledge makes arrogant* (to inflate or puff up) in the sense that, the more you know, the further away you are from others who do not know what you know, making it tempting to look down upon them.
- So knowledge was not the only factor to consider when it came to this practice, *but love edifies* (erect, build, and promotes growth) which contrasts with arrogant knowledge.
- Love provides a check on that knowledge by ensuring other considerations are conducive to Christian outcomes.
- Knowledge by itself without love is inadequate, but love must govern Christian freedom.

Verse 2—*If anyone supposes that he knows anything* is how arrogant people with some knowledge view themselves.

- Instead of this arrogance, it is more honest and humble to admit that *he has not yet known as he ought to know*.
- Actually, the more one knows, the more one does not know, and knows it.
- What a knowledgeable person *ought to know* is that he does not know anything without the revelation of God.

Verse 3—God recognizes those who love Him, *but if anyone loves God* is where their knowledge should lead them.

- Just accumulating knowledge about God does not guarantee intimacy with God.
- However, when it does, then *he is known by God*.

- What is more important is not what you know, though knowledge of God's revelation is not unimportant, but what God knows, namely, that you are *known by God* in such a way that God recognizes you.

Application

Knowledge without the medium of love only rewards arrogance (puffed up), which is based in pride (independence from God). Knowledge will isolate the knowledgeable from the less knowledgeable, and so requires learning loving ways to communicate the knowledge one has, so that it contributes to the edification of others, rather than one's own self-centered ambition.

Knowledge Is Based on the Way Things Actually Are

Verse 4—*Therefore, concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols* takes us back to the original point from verse 1 of eating meat offered as part of an idolatrous offering.

- Since some Corinthians had scruples about eating this meat, accurate knowledge was required to avoid their sinning. That knowledge included:
 - (1) *We know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world.* This affirms what they all knew to be true. Whether stone, metal or wood, there is no kind of god behind it. It only reflects the imagination of the one who designed it. If there are no gods, then the meat offered to them is nothing as well.
 - (2) *That there is no God but one.* There are not many gods. That being the case, all representations of this true God are fake. There is no other being which possesses the quality of God except for one (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Verse 5—(3) The world has many kinds of gods, *for even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth.*

- Many people without a correct concept of deity have many kinds of gods over various areas of life, *as indeed there are many gods and many lords.*
- Some are fake *so-called gods*, and some are manifestations of demons (1 Corinthians 10:20), but none are truly gods. In India alone, there are over three million so-called gods of Hinduism.

Verse 6—(4) *Yet for us there is only one God, the Father.*

- This is true for everyone, whether they believe it or not.
- The Father is the source and goal of all things, *from whom are all things and we exist for Him.* As such, it is this God, our Father who is to be the focus of our lives, the purpose for living.
- It is His Son, *one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him* who is the agent by whom all things exist.
- So there is one true God who exists as Father and Son.
- The Son's equality with the Father is established within the Godhead.
- The world desires their gods to exist, but God has revealed Himself as He who truly exists.
- This is the way things actually are, and this knowledge builds up and does not puff up.

Application

The only true knowledge is knowledge that corresponds with reality. God's revelation in the Bible corresponds with reality as to who God is and what God does. You may want to believe in a God of your own imagination, but that is a deception. Once you make a case for your idolatry, then you have doubled down on your deception, and God then gives up on you (Romans 1). Once you impugn God, then replace Him, there is nothing else God can do with you but give you over to that.

Our Knowledge Must Be Used to Keep the Weaker from Stumbling

Verse 7—Some Corinthians had difficulty shaking the belief that eating meat offered in heathen ritual sacrifices was not real worship of an idol, *however, not all men have this knowledge*.

- Some of the Corinthian believers did not understand their Christian liberty, *being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol*, thinking they were doing something wrong.
- This may be because they are new believers or even carnal Christians, less mature, and weak in conscience.
- So eating this meat, *their conscious being weak* (ἀσθενής feeble or impotent) *is defiled* (μολύνεται polluted or contaminated). They make their conscience dirty.
- The conscience is where one weighs evidence and makes judgments. A weak conscience, confused about the evidence, compromises that judgment.
- An immature believer can experience pangs of guilt when their conscience functions independent of God's Word, while evaluating a situation like eating meat offered to idols.

Verse 8—Foods do not make us more or less pleasing or nearer to God. *Now food will not commend us to God*.

- Eating food offered to an idol is really a non-issue spiritually. *We are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor better if we do eat*.
- God's approval does not depend on what we may do about eating food sacrificed to idols.

Verse 9—We may be free of guilt before God to eat meat offered to idols, but this knowledge must not be the only criterion for eating.

- *But take care that this liberty of yours* indicates that our liberty must have some discernment applied to it, that it not *somehow become a stumbling block* (πρόσκομμα a hindrance or obstacle) *to the weak*, causing injury to their conscience that leads to sin by their eating.

Verse 10—The reason for this concern is *if someone sees you, who have knowledge* (that the meat is nothing) *dining in an idol's temple*, your knowledge communicates it is all right to do that to the one whose *conscience...is weak*.

- The result will be that his already weak conscience will *be strengthened* in its weakness *to eat things sacrificed to idols*.
- A believer's liberty can give a weaker believer boldness to act against his conscience, causing him to sin.
- Ironically, the weaker brother is built up to commit what he regards as sin.

Verse 11—The point of Christian liberty is not that fellow believers who are weak violate their conscience and sin, *for through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined* (ἀπόλλυται to abolish or destroy oneself).

- It's possible that such a strong negative outcome might anticipate the weaker believer actually returning to idolatry as a result of this kind of violation of his conscience.
- The apostle stressed the value of the weaker brother over the exercise of the stronger believer's freedom, *for whose sake Christ died* to indicate that a weaker brother's scruples are not insignificant.

Verse 12—A stronger believer's knowledge can lead to *sinning against the brethren*, since it contributed to their violating their conscience.

- *Wounding their conscience when it is weak*, the knowledgeable and free believer *sins against Christ*.
- We are not free to damage another believer's spiritual life by the use of our Christian freedom.
- This is not sin that is wrong for everybody, like adultery, but sin that is wrong for a weaker brother.
- Not everyone comes into the body of Christ with the same understanding.

- Causing one to stumble this way is to sin against Christ who has called us to build one another up, not destroy each other by the arrogant or indifferent use of our freedom.

Verse 13—The objective *therefore*, is *if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again*.

- Putting himself in the place of the person who causes the weaker Christian to stumble, he would limit his liberty for the sake of weaker believer.
- The purpose for this was *so that I will not cause my brother to stumble* (σκανδαλίσω to be scandalized or offended).
- Mature believers act in love, rather than stand upon their rights.

Application

Believers come into God's household from various entry points. With such a variety of backgrounds and experiences, it is imperative that each one consider those perspectives as we engage with one another in the pursuit of sanctification. Our ministry is one that takes into consideration the spiritual growth and maturity of fellow believers, rather than just one's exercise of his Christian freedom.

Implications

- (1) A believer can only stumble over issues that are really sin. Not drinking, like not eating meat, is a legalistic rule, not a sin issue today. Being drunk is a sin issue. I cannot cause another believer to stumble if I take a drink. But if I get drunk, like eating meat I know was sacrificed to idols, I can cause him to stumble. It sends the message it is okay to get drunk, which the Bible prohibits.
- (2) Be careful that your knowledge does not get you to practice something sinful. Then you have two sins—the sin itself and the sin of disobeying the conscience of newer believer who, instead of correcting you, will follow you. If my knowledge shows me homosexuality is genetic, then I must tolerate it. But whether it is proven genetic or not, it is still sinful. So, if I say homosexuality is okay because its genetic, an older more mature believer would correct me, but a younger new believer or even carnal Christian might then agree or even practice homosexuality.
- (3) Knowledge without the medium of love only rewards arrogance. Knowledge tends to isolate you, and unless you also learn a loving way to communicate, it increases arrogance.