



**Sunday School Lesson for July 9, 2006**  
**Released on July 5, 2006**

**"Called to Help the Weak"**

Printed Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13  
Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13  
Devotional Reading: Mark 9:42-48

**1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

**8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.**

**2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.**

3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

**4 As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that *there is none other God but one.***

5 For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)

**6 But to us *there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Je'sus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.***

7 Howbeit *there is* not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat *it* as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled.

**8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.**

9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

**10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;**

11 And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

**12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.**

13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

**INTRODUCTION**

There are doctrinal essentials in the Christian faith. The inspiration and authority of Scripture, Jesus' virgin birth, His vicarious death, His glorious resurrection, and His second coming are non-negotiables. To this list could be added a number of other Bible doctrines.

On the other hand, there are a variety of opinions held by both individual believers and various Christian groups that do not relate to matters of faith. The problem is that we sometimes elevate opinions to the status of essential doctrine. The Pharisees did this with their traditions and were condemned by Christ for doing so (Mark 7:5-7). Lest we fall into the same trap, we must always be careful to distinguish between nonessentials and essentials.

All should be done in love. If an individual has trusted in Christ as Savior, that person is my brother or sister in Christ. We may not agree on everything, but we must treat each other with courtesy, kindness, and love.

**LESSON BACKGROUND**

During these times, the Greeks and Romans were polytheistic (worshiping many gods) and polydemonistic (believing in many evil spirits). They believed that evil spirits would try to invade human beings by attaching themselves to food before it was eaten, and that the spirits could be removed only by the food being sacrificed to a god. The sacrifice was meant not only to gain favor with the god, but also to cleanse the meat from demonic contamination. Such decontaminated meat was offered to the gods as a sacrifice. That which was not burned on the altar was served at wicked pagan feasts. What was left was sold in the market.

After conversion, believers resented eating such food bought out of idol markets, because it reminded sensitive Gentile believers of their previous pagan lives and the demonic worship. Paul and mature believers knew better than to be bothered by such food offered once to idols and then sold in the marketplace. They knew the deities didn't exist and that evil spirits did not contaminate the food. But some of the weaker believers struggled with this and brought it to Paul's attention and he addressed the issue.

## **LESSON AIMS**

**Facts:** to examine 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, in which Paul dealt with the issue of Christians eating meat that had been offered to idols.

**Principle:** to emphasize the need to support our weaker brothers and sisters in matters of conscience.

**Application:** to help Christians understand how to deal with debatable issues with love and responsibility.

## **Possessing Knowledge**

### **1. What questions did the church have concerning "things offered unto idols" (1 Cor. 8:1)?**

In last week's lesson, Paul had begun to answer practical questions written to him by the Corinthians with the first question referencing marriage. In this week's lesson, Paul deals with another concern raised by the Corinthians which centered around eating meats that had been dedicated to pagan gods. Two issues that the Corinthians struggled with were: First, since most meat sold in the market would have been sacrificed to a pagan god, was it permissible to purchase such meat? Second, was a Christian permitted to attend the activities of the pagan temple, where various social functions were held?

In today's time, we, as believers, have concerns as well. Similar modern questions which may be of concern to us would be: Can we purchase products from a company that also makes things that promote sinful lifestyles? Can we attend social events where things will be done that we consider wrong?

Here, in this lesson on idols, Paul laid down some important principles that are relevant to a number of practical concerns believers still face today.

### **2. What kind of "knowledge" was Paul dealing with? What does knowledge tend to lead to? (vs. 2)**

The person who thinks he knows all about the issues under consideration does not really know all he needs to know. In their letter to Paul, the Corinthians may have indicated that they knew the answer to the question before they asked it. If so, they were, in fact, revealing that they did not know as much as they thought they did!

As Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goeth before destruction." The person who is proud of his knowledge "knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). Conversely, the person who truly loves God wants to please Him and do what is best for his neighbor. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Proceeding on the basis of knowledge alone leads to pride; proceeding on the basis of love with knowledge leads to the edification of the body of Christ.

### **3. How is love for God shown? (vs. 3)**

Love for God is shown through obedience (John 14:15; 15:10). The love principle would lead the Corinthians to choose the most loving response when facing such debatable issues as eating meats offered to idols.

### **The Knowledge Principle**

### **4. As far as Paul was concerned, what was an idol? (vs. 4)**

As we look at this verse, and the question which was raised regarding the eating of those things that were offered in sacrifice unto idols, Paul stated "we know that an idol is nothing". Here Paul was demonstrating that he along with those believers strong in the faith knew that "idols" had no power. They were just merely images made from wood or stone unable to bring about an effect one way or the other. They had no power to bring about good or evil. Paul even went on to say that a lot of the images were called "gods" and were outright fakes and/or manifestations of demons, but none were truly gods.

### **5. For Christians, how is Christ viewed compared to idols? (vs. 6)**

For the Christian, there is only "one God, the Father" (1 Cor. 8:6), and one Lord (Eph. 4:5), Jesus Christ, "the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Paul was presenting the Father and the Son as equal in substance (cf. John 14:7-9) and power (cf. John 1:1-3).

Those who reject the knowledge of the true God quickly turn to idolatry (Rom. 1:20-23). Many missionaries testify that idolatry is alive and well in today's world. Millions still bow before gods made of "gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts 17:29).

### **6. How was the conscience of some of the Corinthians offended? (vs. 7)**

As believers, we must remember that not everyone in Christ are at the same level when it comes to faith. Some believers are strong in the faith while others are just learning how to walk by faith. Here in this passage, some of the believers had come to the conclusion that idols were not real however, there were still some who had not yet made it to this realization.

The consciences of some of the newer converts had them feeling spiritually corrupted and guilty. Although eating idol food had no spiritual power one way or the other, the newer converts were not strong enough in their faith walk to eat the food without feeling as though the idols were real and evil. This no doubt, caused them to feel as though their conscience had been defiled which made them feel violated, bringing fear, shame, and guilt.

## **The Freedom Principle**

### **7. Was the eating of meat a sign of spiritual maturity or weakness? (vs. 8)**

The newer converts, as seen in vs. 7, had a difficult time eating meat that was associated with idolatry. As mentioned previously, unable to separate the eating of meat from the false god it had been dedicated to, these weak brethren had a guilty conscience when they did eat. They had lived their entire lives as pagan worshipers and it was not easy for them to change their thinking about these things. Paul explains to them in verse 8 that the eating of meat does not add to or take away from our spiritual relationship with God. It doesn't bring us any closer to Him nor does it push us away from Him. It has no effect, no power. As far as Paul was concerned, meat was meat and the fact that it may have been burned on a pagan altar was nothing more than a meaningless ritual that had no power over him.

Similarly, early in our Christian lives, we may have been taught that certain forms of recreation, dress, or behavior were either acceptable or unacceptable. If at some point we discover that these were matters of opinion, we might still find it difficult to do what we previously believed to be wrong.

### **8. How could the liberty of some become a stumbling block to others? Why was this an important issue?**

Mature believers might conclude that it was permissible for them to eat any kind of meat but this did not necessarily always make it right to do. They needed to be sensitive to the needs of the weaker brethren. Some stronger Christians may have felt they could eat whatever they wanted to without giving any consideration to those who were weak in their faith.

However, Paul had a strong word of caution about this approach. The freedom enjoyed by the spiritually strong might actually become a hindrance to the weak. Although the mature Christian knows eating of the meat is meaningless and continues to indulge with a clear conscience, the same cannot be said for the weaker brethren. The action of the stronger brother might cause the weaker brethren to participate in the same manner but unable to do so with a clear conscience therefore, causing him/her much guilt and damage to their faith.

"Do you have faith? have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin" (see Romans 14:22-23). The strongest Christian can bring harm to himself in the area of Christian liberty by denouncing or belittling the freedom God has given him, or by carelessly flaunting his liberty without regard for how that might affect others.

### **9. Who do we also sin against if we sin against our brethren? (vs. 12)**

Paul provides us with a very strong warning that causing a brother or sister in Christ to stumble is more than simply an offense against that person; it is a serious offense against the Lord Himself. Our choices in debatable matters can do irreparable damage to the faith of others. We must weigh carefully such decisions, for they can have eternal consequences. If Christ had such compassion as to die for them, we

being "imitators of Christ" should be compassionate as well and deny ourselves for their sakes.

Paul himself was unwilling to do damage to the faith of others, and he laid down an important principle in dealing with such issues. If his eating of meats was in any way offensive to weak Christians, he would make the conscious choice not to eat meat at all. Paul was prepared to give up any exercise of Christian freedom that injures the spiritual pilgrimage of a weak Christian. Christian love is mature enough in its exercise of freedom to find a satisfying expression in restraining for the welfare of the brother, rather than indulgence of self. We as believers must remember that in all we do, we must exercise "love" as Christ did. Love, not freedom, is the highest principle of the Christian moral life. Faith gives freedom; love governs freedom" (Allen).

### **9. What are some current debatable matters that might be similar to those facing the Corinthians?**

When we look at our churches today, we can see that there are things present in the body of believers which can cause division such as the big "I's" and the little "u's". We must be careful how we treat one another and realize that Christ died and paid the price for all of our sins and that no one is greater than the other through the eyes of Christ. We are all the same and all have sinned and fallen short of His glory.

Sometimes, when we come unto the knowledge of Christ, we become so "Holy" and so critical of those who are in need of a Savior, that our "holier than thou attitude" drives those who are seeking away from Christ. Unfortunately, some of us have established our own standards for being saved, or we hold to traditional values that we were brought up with that have no significance in our spiritual growth whatsoever. Or, we may have even added in our own personal values such as "my gift in service (whether you are a choir member, usher, church clerk, etc...), more valuable than yours" - Whatever the case, let us remember that we must exercise that which is good for the soul, and the edification of our brethren. Let us set aside our preferences and opinions for the sake of Christ's kingdom, God's glory, and the benefit of weak Christians, for whom Christ died? As Paul wrote, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (10:23).

### **Conclusion:**

In applying this passage to our lives, it is important to stress the type of situation that Paul has in mind. He is not thinking of differences of opinion over comparatively minor issues between two mature Christians. Paul's extreme statement in verse 13 pertains to situations where a person's conscience is jeopardized by our actions, leading him or her to question personal faith and possibly abandon it in confusion.

Therefore, we must remember that love for others and considering the results of our behavior are our responsibilities (compare Luke 17:1). The key issue is not whether we are "right" in questions of Christian liberty; the key issue, rather, is the attitude we exhibit toward others who do not share our views.

**Prayer:**

Lord thank you for this lesson. Let us as true Christians be mindful of the sensitivity of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Give us the true spirit of compassion driven and guided by your Holy Spirit. For you had much compassion for us when you realized we needed a Savior. You looked down upon this sinful world and were moved off of your holy throne with compassion to save a dying world. Thank you Lord for paying the price for our sins. Instruct us on being good stewards over our spiritual walk so that we are a help to others and not a hindrance. As you did the will of your Father, condition our minds and our hearts so that we may do that which is pleasing in thy sight. Amen.

**Thought to Remember:**

Believers are to be a help and not a hindrance.

**Anticipating Next Week's Lesson:**

Next week's lesson deals with our pursuit of the incorruptible crown. Study "**Called to Win the Race**"<sup>1</sup> Corinthians 9:24-10:13.

**Lesson Summarized by**

Veronica Jasper [veronica@jesusisall.com](mailto:veronica@jesusisall.com)