

Paul answers the Corinthians' questions about meat offered to idols, acknowledging that those who understand that the meat has not been corrupted by the idol are "stronger" in their understanding. However, he stresses that love for their weaker brethren should govern the behavior of the strong so that they do not behave in such a way as to induce their weaker brethren to violate their conscience.

1 Corinthians 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.

"Now as touching things offered unto idols" – Paul moves on to the next question that the Corinthians had asked, this one concerning meats that had been offered to idols. Apparently some in the Corinthian church believed that eating such meat was a sin while others understood that the meat had not been corrupted by the idols. Those who believed they could eat the meat believed themselves to be smarter than those who believed it was a sin.

"we know that we all have knowledge [wisdom; understanding]" – Those that ate the meat shouldn't think of themselves as superior to those that didn't, because everyone has understanding. We all have things that we know that some people don't and there are things that we don't know but others do. There is no reason to become prideful concerning the things that we know but our brother does not.

"Knowledge puffeth up [makes proud], but charity [agape: love] edifieth [builds up]" – We've heard of people who have recently graduated from college and think they are smarter than everyone else. Knowing something that another person doesn't can make us proud, but Paul points out that love is superior to knowledge because love builds other people up while pride tears them down.

"And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" – A man that thinks himself superior because of what he knows is showing how ignorant he truly is. If he understood God's love then he would be humble and show the love of God to those who are less knowledgeable.

"But if any man love God, the same is known of him" – The man that loves God is known by God in the sense that God has an intimate knowledge of Him because the man belongs to Him. The evidence that God knows the man is that he will demonstrate God's love to others.

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.*

The Greeks and Romans believed that evil spirits could invade their bodies through the food that they ate and that these evil spirits could be removed by offering the food as a sacrifice to one of their gods. Paul acknowledges that this practice accomplished nothing and that these idols were not gods. There is only one God, the LORD, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that Paul says that the idol is nothing "in the world." As far as the natural world is concerned, these idols are nothing. However, in the spiritual world there is a demonic presence behind the idols when they are being worshiped (1 Cor. 10:19-20 "What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils"). Here, though, Paul is saying that the idol has no power to alter the meat in any way for a Christian.

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 Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.*

"For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)" – The Greek and Romans worshiped many gods, some purported to reside in heaven and others in the earth. However, all of these gods are false.

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him" – Even though the false gods of the Greeks/Romans far outnumber the one God that we serve, it is our God from Whom all things were created and we exist in Him.

"and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" – The Lord Jesus Christ also participated in the creation (John 1:3 "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made"). He was the agent by Whom all things were created, and we are the redeemed children of God because of the redemption that He accomplished for us on the cross.

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.*

"Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge" – Some of the new converts, who had believed in the power of these idols all their lives, had trouble setting aside their old beliefs and did not understand that these idols were just inanimate hunks of wood, stone or metal. Some may have believed that there was some demonic power that infected the food that was offered to them.

"for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol" – Their belief that the idol had power to affect the food caused them to believe that they had sinned or had placed themselves in spiritual peril by eating it.

"and their conscience being weak is defiled [polluted; contaminated; made dirty]" – Their conscience was defiled because they felt guilty for doing something that they believed was wrong. They believed that they had offended God even though they had not.

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.

The Greek word for "commendeth" carries the idea of "drawing nearer" to God. Meat is spiritually neutral and does not affect our standing with God.

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

The Greek word translated "stumblingblock" refers to an obstacle that could cause someone to stumble and fall. You may understand that meat offered to idols is untainted and have no reservations in eating it, but you should not allow your liberty to do so to become an obstacle that could cause your weaker brother/sister to fall who believes that eating this meat is a sin.

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?

If one of these weaker brothers saw a brother eating meat in the idol's temple then it might give him the boldness to also eat the meat. Such a person might be tempted to return to their old sins of worshiping or respecting the god represented by the idol. Paul places the blame for such an occurrence on the strong brother who acted on his knowledge with no regard for the weaker brother.

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.

“But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ” – Paul calls it a sin when we cause our brother or sister in Christ to stumble. Christ considers a sin against one of His children to be a sin against Him.

“Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend [stumble], I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” – Paul's love for others and for Jesus Christ compelled him to restrain his own spiritual liberty for the benefit of other Christians.

1 Corinthians 9:1-18: In case some of the Corinthians might protest having to restrain their own spiritual liberties for the benefit of others, Paul emphasizes the power and liberty he has as an apostle and that it was for their benefit that he has chosen to not exercise this apostolic power and liberty.

1 Corinthians 9

19 For though I be free from all *men*, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

The Greek word for “free” means “not a slave” and the Greek word for “servant” refers to the lowest of slaves. Paul voluntarily gave up his freedoms as an apostle (among them being the right to ask for support from the Corinthians – vs. 6-14) in order to remove any obstacles to their acceptance of the gospel (v. 12 *“If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.”*).

20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

Paul used the cultural background of his audience when preaching the gospel to them. When preaching to Jews (who were “under the [Mosaic] law”) he would approach them as a fellow Jew. When preaching to Gentiles, who were not under the Mosaic Law, he approached them in a way that made sense to Gentiles. When Paul says that he became “as without law” he makes it clear that he did not mean that he became “lawless” (violating God's moral law). He simply meant that he didn't appeal to Gentiles on the basis of the Mosaic Law. Paul never compromised the truth of the gospel. He simply altered his presentation to fit the audience.

22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.

“To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak” – Paul did not talk over the heads of his audience, using big words or advanced spiritual concepts that they wouldn't understand. Instead, he spoke in simple terms when preaching to the spiritually ignorant so that they could grasp the gospel and believe.

“I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some” – Paul appealed to men/women on their level of understanding in order to give them the best opportunity to comprehend the gospel of Christ and believe.

23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with *you*.

The word “you” is in italics (meaning it is not in the original Greek text) and the Greek word for “with” means “to be a joint-partner.” Paul is saying that he is “all things to all men” so that he can be a joint-participant in salvation with others. He does not want to be alone in the hope of salvation but desires to share it with other people.

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” – The Corinthians were familiar with the Olympic games and also the Isthmian games, which were held at Corinth, so they understood the idea of running in order to receive a prize. Paul urges them to run the race of faith so that they may excel and receive a reward.

“And every man that striveth for the mastery [competes in a contest] is temperate [self controlled] in all things” – Athletes discipline themselves concerning what they eat/drink and how often they go to the gym to train and exercise in preparation to compete in an event.

“Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” – The athletes compete in order to gain a crown of greenery that will wither and decay. The crown that God gives is eternal and will never deteriorate.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Like the athletes, Paul exercised self discipline because he had a specific goal in mind (“not uncertainly”). Using a boxing metaphor, he says he trains, not to be a shadow-boxer, but to fight. He keeps his body under subjection, not indulging it in the things that it wants, in order that insure that he would not become a “castaway” (disapproved; failing the test). The Greek word for “castaway” was often used for coins that were proved to not be genuine and were worthless. Paul did not want God to find him to be worthless as a preacher of the gospel.