



WHEN LOVE TRUMPS FREEDOM

OPENING COMMENT

Our culture has influenced our interaction with the world to be motivated by individualism. Often times our decision making process stops once we have determined what is “right”. As long as we have discerned the correct way to think, feel, act, or be, we do not have to worry about any other factors. Yet Paul’s overarching concern is right action, with the right attitude, sending the current cultural message into a tailspin.

READ THE TEXT: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

⁴ Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in



an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Paul does not directly indicate what the question the Corinthians church asked that occasioned his response, but the text gives us enough clues to understand what it was. After reading the whole passage, what is the question Paul is addressing?
2. "Knowledge" and "love" are ambiguously contrasted in verse 1. By reading through the chapter what knowledge is Paul referring to? (vs. 4,7, 11)
3. Based on Paul's writing in verse 4-6, how should the Christian view idols and other gods?
4. Even though a Christian should understand that there are no other God's, Paul also recognizes that some still struggle to understand the implications of God as revealed in Christ. What then, does Paul indicate will be defiled in these "weaker" believers? (Vs. 7)
5. Paul introduces the position of food in worship in verse 8. What is it? How does this differ from the cultural understanding of the role of food in worship?
6. Verse 9 reframes the conversation from what the church knew, to what it should be concerned about. What does Paul shift the priority to?
7. When a mature Christian, with right understanding, causes a weaker Christian to stumble because of their right understanding, who have they sinned against? (vs. 12)
8. What then is the principle Paul concludes with?

APPLYING THE TEXT

1. It is important to understand that Paul is referring to a context of false worship. The weaker believer does not understand that the meat is offered to something false and dead, and therefore eats to his detriment. What activities in our current context lend weaker believers to idolatry even though the act itself would be neutral?
2. How might our lives look different if we would diligently apply the principle ("I will order my life in a way that ensures my brother will not stumble") espoused by Paul in this chapter?
3. Are there any limitations to this principle that would be wise to consider?
4. How might this principle be applied from the weaker believers perspective?



5. Our tendency is to swing the pendulum to legalism, particularly when principles require discernment. How might we avoid creating unnecessary laws around the principle Paul advocates for?
6. How might this disposition speak to our culture today? How is it a picture of the gospel to the world around us?

BIBLICAL THREAD

1. Leviticus 19:9-18 - Love your neighbour as yourself.
2. Romans 14 - outlines the balance between judging those who do things that seem questionable and living in such a way the does not cause other to stumble.
3. 1 Corinthians 9 - 10 - Paul continues to flesh out what is discussed in Chapter 8.
4. Galatians 5:13 - serve one another
5. Philippians 2:3-4 - right ordering of priorities in regards to others.

CONCLUSION

Paul's overarching concern is right action in an attitude of love toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. Even though we may have liberty to participate in certain activities, our motivation should be concerned with the spiritual health of those we call family in Christ. In essence, Paul is telling the church that they understood the implications of the gospel correctly, but they were applying it to the detriment of others. His direction is to understand what is right and act in such a way that encourages others towards maturity in Christ, instead of risking their salvation.

SHARE & PRAY

LIFE GROUP VISION:

The goal to meeting together around the word of God is three fold. First, we want to more clearly understand what God is saying to us through his Word and apply it to our own hearts and minds. Secondly, we want to build a loving community with each other to disciple one another toward maturity in Christ. Thirdly, we desire each of us, as ambassadors of Christ, to look outwards to our community and ask how we can bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those whom God has placed in our lives.

