

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 8:7-14 - Giving Up Our Rights

We come again to this unusual section about eating meat offered to idols. Remember that this section actually spans chapters 8-10. And I want to give you a practical application up front in this section because I think we might miss it if we're not careful.

The practical application is that as blood bought believers in Jesus, we need to be willing to spend the necessary time with people explaining why we believe what we believe and dealing with all the objections.

The issue here is whether or not to eat meat offered to idols. Can we buy meat in the marketplace? Or more specifically, can we go eat meals at the pagan Temple. Paul actually doesn't directly answer that question until halfway through chapter 10.

Think about that. He could have just said in 8:1: Now concerning food offered to idols, don't eat in the pagan temples and don't ask questions when you buy meat in the marketplace. Next question.

But he doesn't do that. He spends a lot of time in chapter 8 working through our call to love one another. He spends a lot of time in chapter 9 talking about giving up our rights in order to serve one another. Then in chapter 10 he talks about how people can look like followers of God but actually be deceived. He covers all of that before actually answering the question.

Why so much run around? Well, it's not run around, it's that Paul is a patient and wise leader. He knows that many times just simply answering someone's question with a rule doesn't get down to the heart of their issue.

He knows that the Corinthians have a tendency to claim that knowledge is supreme and trumps loving each other. That's not true.

It's only after he covers 3 chapters of material that he actually gives them the commands concerning going to the Temple.

And again, I think part of what we take away from that is that as believers we need to be willing to take the long road to answer questions and objections people have against the gospel or against something specific we're telling them God says to do.

As parents, it's too easy to just tell our kids to do something because we said so or because God said so, rather than actually working through why they're even asking the questions in the first place.

When our friends and family or strangers ask questions about us or what we do, it's easy to do the same thing.

**Prov. 20:5:** the purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.

Sometimes it's more important to know **why** someone is asking a question, than what the question actually is.

With that, let's get into our passage. I'll give a small review of **Vss. 1-6** which we covered last time, then we'll dive in to the rest of the passage.

The issue of eating meat that has been sacrificed to pagan gods doesn't come up a lot in our culture but this was a big deal in the Corinthian church. Pagan idolatry was literally on every corner of Corinth. There were at least 26 known religious places of worship within the city and those places of worship also doubled as fronts for various kinds of markets and storefronts.

Pagan idolatry was just sort of intertwined with everyday life in Corinth and much of the rest of the Roman world. Imagine every business in Deer Park was also a temple to a pagan god - how do you go about your life as a faithful Christian knowing that everything is tainted with idolatry in some fashion?

You could worship Aphrodite at her temple and pick up a steak on the way home from dinner. You could walk past the Zeus temple or the Artemis temple and grab some household goods along with offer your yearly sacrifice.

And the rub for Christians was this: if you bought a hammer or a steak or whatever from a market that was part of the pagan temple, were you actually supporting the activity of the pagan temple? Or worse, were you involved in idolatry directly?

Many of the Christians in Corinth had been saved out of pagan idolatry and so to go back to the temples to do anything was a violation of their conscience.

It seems like more what was happening here is that Christians were going to the pagan temples to actually eat dinner. Many of the Temples had small dining sections where groups could go to eat meals. So not only was the food sacrificed to idols but they were eating that food at the temple in what could only be described as participation in pagan idolatry. They justified this because they claimed that every Christian knew that there was only one God so this, by definition, couldn't be worship of another god because there was no other god.

And what was happening was that these Christians that were going to pagan temples to eat were causing those who had come out of idolatry to be tempted to go back to idolatry. By going to temples and eating dinner at the temples they were essentially encouraging other believers who had been saved out of paganism that paganism wasn't so bad after all.

Watch how he addresses this. **Read 1-4**

So as we saw last time, the first issue he addresses are those who want to make a technical argument that idolatry is okay because we all have knowledge. As Christians we know that there is no such thing as a false god. Those false gods don't exist. So since they don't exist, we can go eat at pagan temples and not worry about committing idolatry because there is no real idol. Tada! Idolatry is solved.

That sounds clever, but it's really just that: clever. It's an argument that puffs them up - fills them with pride because of how smart they seem to be.

Paul actually gets to the heart of this cleverness: that the Corinthians are using this argument to sound smart and avoid actually loving each other. That's what's going on here.

The Corinthians are saying "we all have knowledge."

Every Christian has a certain amount of knowledge about the universe. To be a Christian to have to acknowledge and believe a certain amount of information.

**Rom. 6:17:** You who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were delivered.

There is a standard of teaching, a body of information, someone has to know and believe to be saved. That's the body of truth that Paul touches on briefly in **Vss. 4-6. Read**

See, what was happening was that people were saying "We all know there's only one God, so it's okay to go down to the pagan temple to get some dinner. There's no harm in that because there's no other gods."

"Oh, why didn't God just say that in the first place?" I guess all these warnings in the Bible God gave against idolatry were because God was confused.

That'd be like us saying we know there's only one God, so we can go down to the Buddhist Temple in Spokane and offer incense while we grab some lunch. Or we can stop by the potluck at the Mosque or the Mormon Temple - no sweat - because we know those aren't really gods.

No, that doesn't work. Idolatry is spiritual suicide even if there is no real god behind the idolatry because idolatry is still trading in the one true and living God for something that is by nature not God.

So just because we all know that there's only one god doesn't give us a green light for going to pagan temples.

Alright, so here's the crux of the matter. **Read 7-9**

When someone comes out of a false religion there's usually a fair amount of baggage. They've seen the lies, they've seen the darkness, they've seen the corruption all in the name of this false god. And they want nothing more to do with it because what they experienced was evil.

But someone who hasn't experienced that simply knows that those false religions worshipped nothingness. In fact, Paul says later there are no other gods, they're just demons **10:20**.

But especially when someone comes out of a false religion their conscience can be weak. They want to cut off every possible association with their former life. And rightly so.

If you were a cult prostitute at the temple of Aphrodite and came to faith in Jesus you'd want nothing more to do with that Temple at all. They used you for their gain. But now you're sitting in church and here's a dude who invites you to go grab some dinner at the Aphrodite market. And you're thinking, "What? That place?! They're perpetuating lies and falseness and abuse. Eating there is taking part in the idolatry that I was saved out of."

And the guy inviting you is like "They have a buy one get one free sale at the temple...and Aphrodite doesn't even exist."

One person can't believe someone would do that - support that cult - the other person says "this is basic knowledge to every Christian that this god is not real."

But the knowledge is kind of missing the point, isn't it? That's what Paul is getting to in **Vs. 8. Read**

The issue isn't really about food. Food doesn't bring us any closer to God, nor does food take us away from God. In the NC, we are free to eat whatever food we want to eat. So called Christian diets are not biblical. The Christian diet is eat whatever you want to eat.

The issue here is the context surrounding eating the food. Namely, eating the food in the middle of a temple to pagan gods. That's the problem. And no amount of theological knowledge that there's only one God is going to change the fact that eating food offered to a pagan god in the middle of their own temple is idolatry.

And more than that, Paul's saying: forget the technical theological argument for a minute. Don't you understand what this is doing to your brother in Christ? Don't you understand that by going to the Temple and eating these sacrifices is going to encourage your brother in the Lord to do the same thing? The very idolatry he was saved out of, he's going to be encouraged to go back and take part in?

See, for Paul, the primary issue here isn't about rules or freedom. The primary issue is "are you loving your brother in the Lord?" Are you encouraging him toward godliness or away from it?

This is no small matter. Notice what's on the line here. **Read 10-12**

This is a really important argument here. Our first instinct as Christians isn't "how far can I go in my liberty." The first instinct as Christians should be "are my actions tripping up my brother in Christ? Are they causing him to sin?"

And it seems that the Corinthians are so concerned about their rights to eat whatever that they don't really care about what it's doing to their brothers.

**Vs. 9** - he calls this a stumbling block to them. A stumbling block is just that, it's like setting a bear trap in the middle of the road for your fellow Christian. They go to follow you and this steel trap slams shut on their foot and they drop to the ground bleeding to death.

That's what going to the temple for dinner is doing to their fellow believers.

**Vs. 11** - Paul says this person is destroyed. This word is occasionally used for someone who is ultimately cast into hell. Here it seems to mean that there are true spiritual consequences - true spiritual damage - that is done to a person for whom Jesus died.

Jesus laid down his life to save people from destruction, and here we are destroying those very people by leading them back into idolatry.

**Vs. 12** makes it clear - this is sin. **Read 12**

Not only are we causing them to sin, we are sinning as well. We are sinning against them by dragging them into this idolatry. But we are sinning against Christ himself.

**Look** back at **Matt 18** for a minute.

Jesus addresses this very issue. For Christians, how we conduct ourselves around other believers is a very important issue. We don't ever want to sin. But we also don't ever want to cause someone else to sin either.

If you remember, we have one of the many times the disciples are arguing about who the greatest is in the Kingdom. They're jockeying for best position in the Jesus administration. Jesus says that's not how his Kingdom works. **Read 1-4**

You want to be great in the Kingdom, you take the lowliest spot - the children's table. And not not only do you take the children's table, but you honor those who are humble and don't even think about causing them to sin. **Read 5-6**

This is the kind of sensitivity we are to have with other people. The issue is not "what can I get away with in the Kingdom?" That's what the Corinthians were trying to do.

The real issue is "Are my actions causing my brother to sin?" If they are, it would be better if someone took a millstone, tied it around their neck, and went and drowned themselves. A millstone was a massive rock that was flat and used for grinding up grain into flour. It was a huge boulder. Jesus says, it would be better to drown yourself than to cause someone else to sin.

This is the kind of sensitive conscience we're called to have as we live with our brothers and sisters.

**Look** back at the last verse in chapter 8. Notice the extent to which we are called to love one another. **Read**

You mean to tell me that there might be a situation where we would never eat meat again? We would give up our right to eat meat or our favorite food because it would cause our brother to sin?

Yea. The Christian ethic doesn't start with "How much can I do in my Christian freedom?" The Christian ethic begins with "Am I making my brother fall into sin by my actions?"

Paul's going to tell them in Chapter 10 that they are forbidden from going to pagan temples to eat. That's idolatry. But their biggest issue here is that they don't love each other. They're so concerned about their own rights that they're forgetting to show deference.

So the big takeaway is that we don't want to defile a person's conscience because we have liberty. There are objective limits to what we can and can't do as believers, but one of the things at the forefront of our minds should be our concerns for our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

If that means we don't eat meat - or partake in some freedom for a season - so be it. God is honored when we willingly give up our rights for the good of other believers.

**Pray**