

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 8:1-6 - Eating Meat Offered to Idols

I really struggled this week to know exactly how to approach this section of Scripture this. There's really a lot going on here. Remember how **Chapters 1-4** were all one big long introduction on divisions in the church? And there were rabbit trails and side notes but it all sort of came together?

Well, the same thing is true with this section on food offered to idols. **Chapters 8-10** are all one big section on the issue of whether or not Christians should eat food that has been sacrificed to idols. What we just read seems to end at **Chapter 8**. But really it keeps going through Chapter 9 and then into **Chapter 10**. **Chapter 9** and the first half of 10 are a side note and then **look at 10:18-30**. **Read**

So this discussion stretches 3 whole chapters. The argument that Paul makes is kind of elaborate and gets into the issue of Christian liberties and rights and even how we care for those who minister the gospel.

Added to the complexity is that we don't really live in a culture where eating meat sacrificed to idols is an issue at all. We don't have pagan temples where they sacrifice cows and goats where you can go to get a steak dinner or go get a Tri tip to bring home and cook up on your BBQ wondering if you've actually just aided in the worship of idols. So not only does it take some time to wrap our mind around the issue, but once we do we're left asking what difference does it make anyway?

Let me answer that in 2 ways. First, even if a particular issue doesn't seem to be relevant for us right now, that doesn't mean it won't be later. Not many of us had thought all that much about our duties as Christians to submit to the government until about 18 months ago. The government hadn't ever really done anything that flew directly in the face of God's commands to worship him together.

So just because something isn't an issue right this moment, doesn't mean it won't be an issue really quickly. We don't have pagan Temples right now, but that doesn't mean we won't. Or won't have something comparable to it.

The second thing we need to keep in mind is that part of Christian ethics - our moral obligations as believers - are based on principles we learn in passages, not just direct commands.

There's no verse that says "Black Lives Matters is sin" - but there are a whole host of verses that say we all come from one common ancestor - Adam - and that to show partiality to anyone based on skin color is sin. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek nor male nor female: we don't judge people according to their appearance, we judge them according to their who they are in Christ and based on their character.

Part of what we do as Christians is extrapolate principles from the Bible based on specific passages. Here there are implications about where we spend our money. Implications about what stores or businesses we might go to. Who we might associate with. And even our attitude about how we treat those who are not as mature in the faith as we are.

So I want to paint you a little bit of a picture about what was going on in Rome and in Corinth in terms of idolatry and then jump into our passage.

In Rome, the pantheon of gods was a given way of life. Whether people took it seriously or not, it crept it's way in to every aspect of life. People swore oaths by their favorite gods, visited temples of the gods where there were often civic activities, and their culture and even trade revolved around this religion.

When we think of Israel in the OT we often think of their comprehensive life revolving around Yahweh. They worked on God's schedule, they traded according to his rules, their capital city Jerusalem was also where God's Temple was. Worshipping Yahweh was a way of life.

Well, that was true for the pagans all throughout the Roman Empire. **Look** back at **Acts 19**. This gives you a little idea of how ingrained idolatry was in the Roman world. This is Paul in the city of Ephesus which was just 200 miles across the ocean from Corinth. **Read 21-41**

So the whole city is in a massive riot over the preaching of the gospel. And the reason for the riot is that the preaching of the gospel threatens to shut down the income of the idol makers. People might not buy the little silver Artemis idols because maybe they'll stop believing she's a god. This city, by the way, believed that they had been chosen specifically to represent Artemis because they had a meteorite fall from heaven and they assumed it was from Artemis.

And they all go nuts because the preaching of the gospel might shut it down.

This was the religious fervor in Ephesus. But it was the way Rome worked in general. And also in Corinth. Corinth had no less than 26 different sacred places, including temples to various gods as well as a Jewish synagogue. And these temples had various levels of involvement religiously. You could go to one temple and there'd be cult prostitutes as well as fruits and vegetables available. The religious rituals that people got involved in at the city were all kinds of crazy including one where they would sacrifice a goat, tear out it's bowels to discern the will of the gods.

And these temples and religious places were all over town. And something to keep in mind was that the temples weren't like our churches where they just did religious stuff there one day a week and then went on their way. Temples were often places of trade and had small markets at them. You could buy animals, clothes, goods, slaves, food, prostitutes, all kinds of things. And so what went on at a Temple sort of blended into ordinary, every day life.

Imagine if our town was like ancient Corinth: our grocery store was a temple to Baal. You could worship there and also grab some wine and bread and meat. The meat was probably sacrificed early that day to Baal. They prayed over the cow and slaughtered it as a thanksgiving sacrifice to Baal. And sold most of it to the customers.

The hardware store was a Temple to Zeus. You could offer your yearly goat sacrifice and also grab a hammer and a yoke for your new oxen.

There were shops all over town that sold goods and but you could also offer burnt offerings to Caesar as well. Just take a little pinch of flour to give him adoration as a god while you wait for shop.

And just imagine most of the stores were like this. Not all but most. And now you've come to faith in Jesus who is the one true and living God. Where do you shop? Do you go back to the temple of Aphrodite where there are prostitutes and slaves for trade and pick up a Tri Tip for tonight's dinner? If you do that are you actually supporting idolatry? Are you supporting false worship?

What about other places where you don't know if the meat vendor is connected to the Temple? They've got a stand near a temple but you're not 100% sure where the meat came from. Did they sacrifice it to Baal that morning? If so do you eat it? Do you not? What do you do?

That's the rub back in **1 Cor. 8**. We'll see some practical implications of these issues. If we know someone is selling meat that has been sacrificed to idols can we eat it? Can we even shop at a place that's run by a pagan? What about a place that is a pagan temple? We'll get to some of those implications.

But the biggest thing I want us to walk away with this morning is that when we have a disagreement with a fellow believer about what is or is not right we need to show each other love and grace.

There are going to be many things we disagree with each other about in the Christian life. Some of these things are very volatile topics. Vaccines, masks, what movies we watch, what items we buy, clothes we wear, music we listen to, on and on.

I'm sure have a few issue are important to you. But what Paul wants us to understand is that having the right answer on these issues is not as important as showing love and grace to each other.

Grace and love and mercy must prevail.

1) Knowledge without love is useless. **Read 1-3**

So as we've seen before, in 1 Corinthians when Paul says "Now concerning" what he's doing is addressing questions the Corinthians wrote him about. They wrote about sexual immorality, they wrote about what should a betrothed person do if they come to faith in Jesus. Here, the issue is food offered to idols. Paul, what do we do here? Do we boycott the temple? Do we not eat meat? Do we eat? What's the answer.

And I love his heart here because he doesn't answer the question right away. He gets to their attitude and heart toward one another. And I think we as a church need to pay attention to what he says. We're a nerdy church. We value knowledge and facts and biblical exegesis and theology. Those are all really good things.

The problem with those things is that we can often have all the right information in the world and be absolutely terrible to one another. That's why Paul addresses the heart first. **Read 1**

So as we've seen, the Corinthians had all these slogans. "Do not go beyond what is written," "All things are lawful for me." Another slogan they seem to have had was "all of us possess knowledge." And the idea here is that there were some people in the Corinthian church who would go to the pagan meat market and knowingly grab a steak from the pagan butcher who had offered it up to Baal that morning and scarf that baby down that night for dinner. And their attitude toward the other Christians was "you fools, there's no real Baal; we all know that - we all possess that knowledge - so stop whining and pass the potatoes."

And the guys who had just been saved out of the cult of Baal worship were absolutely mortified. "That steak your throwing on the bbq is literally perpetuating idolatry. It's literally paying a priest for their false worship."

Surprise, surprise there was division in the Corinthian church over where you could buy meat for your bbq.

The real issue was pride. Especially pride on the part of those who who bought the meat claiming we all have this knowledge. **Read 1b**

This knowledge you have is actually puffing you up. It's making you prideful. Literally the idea is you're becoming a wind bag - you are full of air. Or we would say "you're full of yourself."

The problem when people have just knowledge is that they become arrogant. They think they know all. They think they're the source for all things. And they look down on anyone who either doesn't know what they know, or disagrees with them.

Let me give you a couple examples. When someone first begins to understand reformed theology and understand predestination and Calvinism usually the first thing you notice is their arrogance. The Babylon Bee - a Christian satire website - published an article that said "*Newly minted Calvinists' Ego Seen from International Space Station.*" They've got all this knowledge and zero love and they are intolerable to be around.

The same thing often happens when people learn about end times stuff or a new preacher they like on YouTube.

You can choose the political hot topic of your choice right now and it's the same thing. Usually those who know a lot are the most arrogant rather than the most loving.

And here's what gets me: When someone has believed something for a long time, then changes their mind on it, and now they can't stand those people who still believe like they did just 4 months ago. What nerve! They have absolutely no grace, no love toward anyone who might have a different view.

Look over at chapter **13:1-3**. This is the love chapter and it gets to this very idea. **Read 1-3**

You can have all the spiritual gifts in the world, but if you have no love you're like a 3 year old banging on a drum kit. You're just irritating noise.

And you could literally know all things - you can be omniscient like God - and if you had no love you would be nothing. Zero.

Knowledge by itself is absolutely worthless in God's eyes without love. And by love Paul means practical, sacrificial, self-giving love because that's what he goes on to describe. **Read 4ff**

This is not a theoretical love. This is not a pie in the sky love. This is a gentle, patient, kind love that keeps no records of wrong and always assumes the best about people.

"Knowledge is proud that it has learnt so much; wisdom is humble that it knows no more." - W. Kay

Many of the Corinthians had been saved out of this lifestyle. If you had lived in Corinth prior to being a Christian, you had been to a temple, ate at temples, bought and sold stuff at the temple markets. This was just the way of life for you.

Then along comes Paul - the apostle of Jesus - preaching that there's only one true and living God. This God has made himself known by sending his Son Jesus to suffer for the sins of his people and rise again and will one day judge the world and your only hope is to

Back in chapter 8, he says that knowledge isn't the be-all-end-all. Let's be clear: you have to have a certain amount of knowledge to be saved. But who's knowledge really matters? **Read 2-3**

This is an interesting twist. Our knowledge is limited. If we think we know it all it turns out we don't really know it all. On the other hand, if someone loves God, then God knows us.

John 10:14: I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me.

2 Tim 2:19: God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: The Lord knows who are his.

Because what is supreme in God's mind isn't having exhaustive knowledge. It's love. The two greatest commands are love God and love neighbor.

And what he's doing here is shifting away from people being so concerned about knowing the ins and outs of idolatry in Corinth and how every aspect of our lives is affected by that knowledge and he's putting emphasis on a sincere love for God.

So knowledge without love is useless.

2) Every Christian has a certain amount of knowledge about the universe.

So the next thing we need to say is that while knowledge isn't the most important thing, there is a certain amount of knowledge that is required to be saved.

- 1) Bible and Bible alone is the Word of God.
- 2) Trinity
- 3) That plan of salvation is that the Father sent Jesus into the world to die on a cross for sin and rise again the third day and ascend into heaven where he will one day come again.
- 4) We are sinners by nature and by action and that salvation is by having faith alone in Jesus alone as Lord and not of works.
- 5) That all who repent from their sin and trust in Christ are saved.

There is a base amount of knowledge needed to be saved. God is not anti-knowledge. The purpose of evangelism is to spread the knowledge of the work of God in Christ throughout the world. Without that knowledge people cannot be saved.

That's why we do missions: because faith comes by hearing. People will not be saved on their own. They won't be saved by simply looking at the sky and acknowledging there's a god out there somewhere. They have to hear the gospel message and believe the gospel message.

We call this the exclusivity of the gospel. You know where a news company gets an exclusive interview it means they're the only one to interview a particular person. They alone have the connection.

The exclusivity of the gospel is that this is the only way to salvation. This message needs to be heard in order to be saved.

Here, the knowledge people have in particular about the gospel that Paul highlights is that there is only one God. There are not thousands of gods or millions of gods. There's only 1. **Read 4**

So when the Corinthians say "we all have knowledge" the knowledge that Paul says is common knowledge is that there is only one God. What goes on at the pagan temples is not really honoring any god because these other gods don't exist. Baal doesn't exist. Zeus doesn't exist. Thor and Odin don't exist. There is only one true and living god. **Read 5-6**

So he says there's a lot of people who claim that these other gods exist. Some of them in heaven, some on earth. The reality is they don't exist.

There's just one triune God. Here he mentions just 2 persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son. The Father is the source and the Son is the agent. Watch how he describes them both. It's almost identical except with a couple changes. **Read 6**

Father: From whom are all things and for whom all exist.

Son: Through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

So the Father is the source, the Son is the agent. The Son carries out all that the Father desires.

It's kind of like when someone builds a house. And the general contractor hires a concrete guy and a framer and roofer and drywall guy and flooring guy and on and on. Who built the house? The general contractor? Or the trades guys? Well, it's kind of both isn't it?

The same thing is true with God. There's only 1 God but all things are from the Father and all things happen through the Son.

We'll see later that all things are animated through the Spirit.

But that's basic knowledge. There is no Allah. There is no god of the JWs or the Mormons. There's no Buddha. We're going to watch Moana: there's no Maui, there's no Tekah or Tafi. It's all fun but it's all fiction.

There's only one God: Father, Son and Spirit. That's basic to the Christian confession.

3) How people respond to this knowledge is going to vary. **Read 7-9**

So here's the deal: when someone comes out of a false religion there's usually a far amount of baggage. They see the lies, they see the darkness, they see the corruption 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 when someone comes out of idolatry of any kind their conscience can be weak. They want to cut off every possibility 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 told you he just bought steaks at the Aphrodite market. And you're thinking, "What? That place?! They're perpetuating lies and falseness and abuse."

And the guy with the steaks is like "They had 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."

Someone watches an action movie and says "I can't believe you'd support violence" and the guy watching the action movie says "You know no one is actually dying right."

Someone watches a Disney voice and says "You know this is a pagan animation story" and the other person says "You know there is no magic or god, right?"

Someone came out of drunkenness and can't imagine drinking a beer "How could you drink that stuff?" . Another guy has a microbrewery at home "Jesus turned hundreds of gallons of water into wine - first miracle."

This is the hard part of Christian knowledge and freedom. Because our responsibility doesn't simply end at a debate of information. Who's right? Do we watch the movie? Do we shop at a store who support things that we don't?

Our job as Christians is to love people who have a different perspective than we do.

4) Be careful to love those who differ from you. **Read 9-13**

So the big takeaway is that we don't want to defile a person's conscience because we have liberty.

We can drink beer, we can watch movies, we can eat meat that was cut up at a pagan temple because their god doesn't even exist. But we need to be careful that what we do doesn't unnecessarily offend other brothers in the faith.

And you need to understand, a lot of times people are adamant about these issues. They don't want anything to do with them because there has been real damage. We need to walk carefully. Not out of fear but out of love.

Notice the words Paul uses. These are powerful words. And they are what those with "knowledge" can do to those who have a sensitive conscience.

Read 9-13: stumbling block, destroy, sin against them, wound, sin against Christ, fall into sin, fall into sin.

There can be some differences of opinion on where we buy steak. Or lumber. Or what entertainment we take part in. There are certainly limits, but there's room for differences too.

What there's no option on is that we don't stumble our brothers and sisters in Christ when we have a disagreement.

One last thing: how do weak brothers and sisters become strong? No one wants to remain weak, right?

Two ways: information and time. We teach them the Bible. We teach them what God says about issues of conscience, we teach them about what God says about alcohol or entertainment or idols. They need the information.

But the second way is time. A lot of times when someone comes to faith in Jesus they pendulum swing far away from what they were around before Jesus. Those who were drunks never want to touch alcohol again or go into a wine store. But over time they tend to realize that that's not what the Bible says. And maybe they never take a drink again, but they embrace those who do drink to the glory of God.

We need to be patient with each other in this process. We need to love each other. God has called us out of sin from a variety of backgrounds to glorify him together.

If that means we don't eat meat - or partake in some freedom for a season - so be it. To God be the glory.

Pray