

1 Corinthians #14
Setting an Example
1 Corinthians 8: 1-13

One of the best thing about living the Christian life, other than being saved, is the fellowship into which we are introduced with others know and love the same Savior. It crosses over boundaries of race, class, and background, and draws us together in the glorious recognition that we are one in Christ. This is a fellowship about which the unbelieving world knows nothing about, a relationship based on our spiritual union in the body of Christ.

Speaking of fellowship, I would like to for each of you to come to a Barbecue. Although we will be eating in the Fellowship Area, we will begin outside with the usual festivities. **First there'll be the slaughtering of the bull as an offering to the gods.** If you would like, you can join the procession beneath the slaughtering platform to allow the bull's blood to drip on you, so the strength of the bull, and of course the god he represents, will pass into you. But there really is no need for you to do that of course, because the strength of the bull will be there when you eat anyway. **I am convinced that it will be a great evening of fellowship and sharing our lives together.** So if you would like to come, just let me know.

As strange as that might sound to us here tonight, that is exactly the dilemma that Paul is dealing with here in 1 Corinthians 8. In fact, it was a two-fold dilemma. **First was the fact that the steak being served up would first have been offered to a pagan god.** In fact that was a problem whenever you wanted to eat meat. The practice of public sacrifices required that the animal being sacrificed was divided up. **Part was burnt as an offering to the god. Part was taken by the priests for their meals.** The rest was given to the magistrates and other public officials as part of their livelihood. **What they didn't need they sold to the shops and markets for general sale.**

So for the Christian there was this dilemma that in order to eat meat they would be taking into their bodies something that had been made unclean by this act of pagan worship.

But the other side of the dilemma was that if you refused to eat meat then you cut yourself off from the majority of social occasions you might otherwise be part of. That was not good from a personal point of view of course but more importantly it would mean that you cut yourself off from any opportunity to make connections where the gospel can be shared with those who need to hear it.

Obviously, there were two dominant groups in the Corinthian church. One group we will call the **Libertists**, and this group claimed that their freedom in Christ nullified any concern over whether meat had been sacrificed to an idol. The other group we will call the **Legalists**, and this group was very concerned, and felt that eating meat given to an idol was taking part in idolatry. **And there disagreement on this issue was on the verge of dividing that Corinthian church.**

So the Corinthian Christians asked Paul “Is it OK to eat food that’s been sacrificed to idols, or should we avoid it? Should we become vegetarians perhaps? Should we remove ourselves from the social contexts of the city?”

As both sides eagerly await Paul’s answer, He answers in a very unusual way, and he begins from a theological perspective. Look at verses 1-3, “Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.”

The libertists argued that their superior knowledge about spiritual things exempted them from concern in this area. But Paul reminds them that their so-called “knowledge” had caused them to be filled with spiritual pride.

“Knowledge,” Paul says, “puffs up – makes you feel pretty special, makes you feel maybe better than somebody else.” Albert Einstein once said: “Any fool can know. The point is to understand.”

One of the subtle tricks that Satan tries to trap us, as Christians, with is that of spiritual pride. I am convinced that spiritual pride is as prevalent today as it was in Paul’s day, especially among those Christians who see themselves as “spiritual.” And the more “spiritual” we see ourselves the more that we overestimate our own value to the kingdom. **Notice that I did not say “in” the kingdom, but “to” the kingdom.** Each of us are equally important to our Father, but unfortunately, they are not unlike the statement of a religious leader in Jesus' day as he looked upon a sinner on his knees who was crying out for God's mercy in Luke 18:11, “I thank you, God, said the Pharisee, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there.”

The danger of spiritual pride is a real one, and the bible teaches that spiritual is the ugliest one of all. Why does Paul see spiritual pride as so dangerous? **Paul says that when I am guilty of spiritual pride, it is because I have lost sight of the cross.** Never mind the warning from Jesus found in Luke 14:11 that says, “He who humbles himself will be exalted and he who exalts himself will be abased.”

The problem with the Pharisees of Jesus' day is that, although they were supremely religious, they did not have a clue about the pain of the people around them. They never saw them as individuals; they only saw them as someone beneath what they saw themselves as. Because of their spiritual pride, the Corinthians believers they saw themselves as flawless, and they saw others, even other believers, as flawed individuals. **And when that happens, we begin "finger pointing" and "fault finding."**

Child of God, any attempt to better ourselves at the mercy of someone else's failure will always bring a twisted view of us and others. The truth of the matter is this, except for the amazing grace of a loving God none of us would be anything worthwhile to anybody, especially to God!

Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." **In other words, all of our knowledge and all of our actions should be colored by our reverent respect for the Lord of our salvation – of knowing Him – and being known by Him.** The Christian life is not just a bunch of do's and don'ts, but Romans 8:29 reminds us that belonging to God means becoming like Him in character.

And what is His character? 1 John 4:8 says, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." **And what does that character of love do?** John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

The essence of knowledge is knowing God and His self-sacrificing love. And Paul says that kind of knowledge will cause you to love other people and not being constantly critical of them.

Now, look at verses 4-6, "So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

Notice that Paul now responds directly to the question of eating meat sacrificed to idols. In verse 4 He says, "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one." Paul's answer goes back to the teaching found in Habakkuk 2:18-20 which says, "Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, Come to life! Or to lifeless stone, Wake up! Can it give guidance? It is covered

with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”

Technically, an idol is anything that comes between us and God – anything. But here Paul is speaking of literal idols that people sacrificed to. There were those early Christians who exposed to a teaching that taught that evil spirits attached themselves to food, and entered your body when you ate the food they were connected to. Therefore, their conclusion was that if you eat food that has been sacrificed to idols you will become demon-possessed.

But Paul basically says, “All of that stuff is nonsense, because there is only one true God, and all of these idols are false, they amount to nothing, they have no power to cause you any harm.” **On top of all that, God is greater than any evil spirit.**

Now you and I know that when we receive Jesus Christ as personal Savior, He takes up residence in us in the Person of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Ephesians 1:14 refers to the believer as “the purchased possession.” **So we know that no Christian can be *demon-possessed* because we are already *God-possessed*.** Although it is true that Christians can be *demon oppressed*, which is a different thing altogether.

So Paul’s conclusion is that since there is only one God, and idols have no real existence, offering food to idols won’t change the food. So we are free to eat without condemnation.

Having said all of that, Paul now uses the conjunctive word “but” as he continues in verses 7-8, “**But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.**”

Having said that we are free to eat anything, Paul now gives us this word of warning when he says, “Not everyone has this knowledge.” **In other words, if we are not careful, we will allow the very thing that we are so grateful for, our freedom, to become a “stumbling block” to some other Christian who just might not understand what Christian freedom really is.**

And having said that, I need to remind you that Satan also wants to use your Christian freedom to set a trap for you. The truth of the matter is that it takes a strong Christian to live in freedom. Why? Because we live in a body that is not saved, and some of us have come backgrounds that were lived in bondage. And although we are free to eat and drink in moderation, our flesh will set us up to abuse that freedom. And when that happens, freedom very quickly turns into sin. Therefore, it is important for us as Christians to ask

ourselves how our actions are going to affect other believers who are weak in the flesh.

This is an important point, the issue is not whether or not you are technically right, because sometimes in our quest to assert our freedom in Christ we may actually be the very instrument that Satan will use to cause a young believer to sin. Why? Because they have not learn the true meaning of moderation!

Look at what Paul says in verses 12-13, “When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.” Folks, it does not matter what area of your life you are dealing with: eating, drinking, recreation, work, etc., if you lose your sense of balance you become sinful in what you are doing.

Let me close with these words from Paul found in Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Let me close with this illustration. **Have you ever noticed a dog that is fenced in a small yard?** Usually, he is barking and pacing back and forth. He jumps at the gate begging to get out. And if someone inadvertently lets him out or he escapes, he runs through the neighborhood, knocking over trash cans, scaring cats and chasing cars.

But, if you take that same dog to live on a piece of property with wide open spaces and no fences. That same dog sits on the porch with little desire to run and chase even the cats that are within a few feet from its nose. **What has made the difference in his life?** The answer is simple - He knows that he is free and does not need to prove it to anyone.

Child of God, listen to this statement, when you truly understand how free you really are in Christ, you do not have to run around “living lose” to prove it to anyone. Listen and get this, the greatest freedom that you will ever have is to represent Christ to those around you!!

If you have never been saved, why not come tonight?