

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

February 16, 2021

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Corinthian Letters

The Long Letter (First Corinthians)

Text – 1 Corinthians 8 – *Inquiring About Idols*

Memory Verse – 1 Corinthians 8:13

"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

Introduction

This chapter is obviously Paul's response to an inquiry regarding eating meat which was often purchased from vendors who offered animals initially as a sacrifice in the idol's temple. The pagan cultures were not only polytheistic, but they were also "polydemonistic", and they believed that demons could attach themselves to people through the food that they ate. The only way to prevent this was to offer the animals as a sacrifice. Christians were struggling about whether they should buy such meat, eat in the idol's temple, or even to eat meat purchased by somebody else that was offered to an idol.

Paul uses this question to open a discussion regarding Christian liberty. The more we grow in the Christian life, and the more we are used by God the less "liberty" we will have. The requirements for the teacher are greater than those he teaches; the requirement for the pastor and his family are greater than for those he pastors. Though it may be "lawful" to participate in certain activities, it may not be profitable for others. We may be pointing our weaker brethren in the wrong direction. As ambassadors for the Lord, we have a responsibility to be a good testimony in front of those around us. Two words that come to mind as we discuss this portion of Scripture are discernment and discretion. We can take this principle to the point of lunacy; but it is far better to err on the side of safety than to be careless around those we are mentoring.

Paul gave us a prelude to this discussion back in chapter six:

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power." (1 Corinthians 6:12-14)

In chapter six, however, the Paul's point was that not everything that is permissible for me is good for me. Here in chapter eight, he makes a slightly different point – all things that are permissible for me may not be good for my brother.

See also Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 10:23 – 33

I. The Puffed Up Saints at Corinth (vs. 1 – 3)

It seems here that the Corinthians were asking the question while offering their own answer. People often do this when seeking counsel. They wanted to know the letter of the law, but were not concerned about the spirit of the law. Knowledge must follow virtue. (2 Peter 1:5)

A. Knowledge Puffs Up – literally means to inflate

Paul uses the word, “knowledge” (γνῶσιν from γνῶσις – *gnosis*) over and over again in this passage (five times in chapter 8). It’s almost as if Paul is saying to the Corinthians, “you know too much for your own good.” In other words, the Corinthians knew that they were under grace, but it seems that were taking grace too far. They may have been permitted to do some things, but those things that they allowed in their lives were potentially causing problems for other people.

B. Charity Fills Up (edifieth) – literally means to build a house

Your love for others will profit them much more than your knowledge. Arguing your point with people rarely helps them.

Your love for God will cause Him to know you. To some He will say, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23)

II. The Principle Stated as Confidence in our Liberty (vs. 4 – 6; 8)

This is the knowledge mentioned in v. 1

Refraining from meats offered to idols was one of the few things that the Jerusalem Council warned the Gentile believers about.

"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well."
(Acts 15:28-29)

A. The Idol is Nothing – There is only one God. There are other spiritual beings – devils - that are called gods by the heathen (see also 1 Corinthians 10:20 below); but we know that they are limited where God is infinite.

"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." (1 Corinthians 10:20)

There is only one God (v. 6):

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

B. The Meat is Nothing – we are spiritually no better or worse off for eating or not eating it. (v 8)

III. The Problem Solved through Consideration for the Weaker Brother (vs. 7; 9 – 13)

This is the charity mentioned in v. 1

When your liberty becomes a stumbling block to others around you it becomes a sin against Christ. (v. 12)

Conclusion

We are ambassadors for Christ; therefore we represent him to everyone around us. We therefore are not only to abstain from things that God says are wrong for us; but also we need to be very careful not to participate in things that may cause a weaker brother to stumble and fall.

The more you grow; the more God uses you, but you will also have less liberty. Remember, you are not your own.

