

Next Question. Having dealt with their questions regarding marriage and singleness, Paul moves on to another. This one is about partaking in food offered to idols. As he had briefly touched on gender issues earlier in the epistle (ch.5; 6:15-18) before taking up their specific questions, he had also touched on food issues earlier as well, ch 6:13. Now the question before him is not a trivial one, although we might tend to think so at first. Lots of folks watch what they eat for religious reasons even today, and even more do so for health reasons. The Corinthian saints were deeply concerned for “religious” reasons because they had been saved out of idolatry and, rightly, had a sensitive conscience about anything even remotely connected with it.

Paul discusses issues about eating here in chapter 8 and again in chapters 10, 11, and 15. He also speaks about it in Romans 14, etc. The Lord speaks of it too. The first sin had to do with eating something forbidden. Many Old Testament laws that had to do with eating do not apply to New Testament believers.

Here in chapter 8 their question was about **eating things that had been sacrificed to idols**. Apparently much of the meat sold in the meat markets of that day was slaughtered as part of pagan, idolatrous rituals. Once the offering was presented in the pagan temple the food not needed by the priestly families was sold out the back door to merchants who resold it in their markets.

The question, as usual, immediately leads Paul back to the basic principles involved. It’s a good practice for us also when we have a question. Underlying their predicament was the issue of **knowledge**. This reminds us of the first part of the epistle where he shows them that human wisdom and knowledge were not how they were saved. He was there laying the foundation for what he had to say here. Mere knowledge tends to make one proud, boastful and domineering toward those who may seem to be less intelligent or have less learning. That attitude is very common among the well educated of the world today. They often consider themselves the elite and thus qualified to make pronouncements about how all others, presumably less well informed, should think and live. Unfortunately it is also very common in the religious world and even among believers, e.g., the clergy-laity system so common and accepted today. We need to beware of unduly exalting knowledge at the expense of love. Only love can properly apply knowledge of God’s word, the truth, so that it edifies (spiritually builds up) others. If we become occupied with our knowledge, correct and comprehensive as it may be, we are falling short of God’s intent. The truth is not an end to itself, beautiful to our hearts and souls as it is. Truth is given to reveal God to us, His plan, His ways, His will, His character and most of all His love and His Son, Eph. 4:15.

If we love God, then we are said to be “known of God,” not, in this case, to know God. Knowing that He knows us is a very humbling discovery. It puts us in our place, not of human exaltation and power, but near to God’s heart. There we discover that, no matter what we know, we are expected to freely sacrifice whatever rights or privileges we have been given by God for the sake of someone weaker than we. Wow! But that’s the pattern God showed us in giving His Son.

Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

That’s the path the Lord took in becoming a man to die for our sins, Philippians 2:5-10. Certainly we seek to be like Him.

Paul now tells us **the facts**, what we can know. Idols are nothing in the world since there is no other God but ONE. The world has many gods and persons in positions with many of the privileges of gods, namely judges, governors, kings presidents, etc. (These have been granted their positions by God, Romans 13:1-7). But there is but one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ. All things are **of** the One God, the Father. All things, in turn, are **through** the One Lord, Jesus Christ. These scriptures strongly affirm the deity of the Father and of the Son, and the distinct persons of the Father and the Son. Knowing this puts all idols in their proper place in our thoughts. **They are nothing!** (But in chapter 10 we will learn there may be demons behind them)

So we personally can, with clear conscience, eat something sold in a meat market that had been sacrificed to an idol. So far so good. **BUT:** some believer may not know what we know. He/she may think that they would be sinning if they ate of anything that had been sacrificed to an idol. What if they saw one of us, who had no problem with it, eat it? (We can eat because we know what scripture teaches, that there is only **ONE GOD**.) If they then, having seen another freely eat, go ahead and eat, despite having a conscience against it, they fall. They would have a defiled conscience. Not because what they did was in itself wrong, but because they thought it was wrong and did it anyway. Wow!

So we’ve learned two things:

- I. **We are our brother’s keepers.** We are to avoid anything in our lives which might stumble another, even if we know from scripture we are free to do it. This principle of love is not limited to things sacrificed to idols.
- II. **Whatever is not of faith is sin.**

Romans 14:23 But he that doubts, if he eat, is condemned; because [it is] not of faith; but whatever [is] not of faith is sin.

Decisions we make against our conscience make us guilty!

More next time.

By Ron Canner, April 23, 2003