

The unfolding of your words gives light.

## The Temple of God

### An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

<sup>8:1</sup> Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge<sup>a</sup>. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies<sup>b</sup>. <sup>2</sup> If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; <sup>3</sup> but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him<sup>c</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one<sup>d</sup>. <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called

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<sup>a</sup> **8:1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge.** Here is yet another topic about which the Corinthians had asked Paul. They may have wanted a simple “Don’t do it” or “Do it” answer. Paul gave them something better. He called the people to think God-centered thoughts rather than simply follow a rule.

Offerings to idols produced a lot of food. This excess was sold in the public market, likely at a reduced price. Christians faced the question regarding the morality of purchasing this meat. This was an issue across the empire, as the elders of the Jerusalem Council wrote:

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell. Acts 15:28-29

This letter did not promote legalism. It promoted peace in the church. But was it wrong to purchase and eat that meat?

Notice all the “know” words in this chapter (eleven by my count). Regarding the truth that idols are merely inanimate objects, many of Paul’s readers might have said, “Everybody knows that.” Regarding the truth that idolatry is the ultimate betrayal of God, many more of Paul’s readers might have said, “Everybody knows that.” Paul taught that this is more than an intellectual matter.

<sup>b</sup> **8:1 Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.** A legitimate and more memorable way to translate this is: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” This is not an attack on knowledge. That is a common but unfair accusation against Christianity. Knowledge is not the problem. Pride is.

<sup>c</sup> **8:2-3 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.** The man who “supposes that he knows” is the proud man. Proverbs describes him:

Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. Proverbs 26:12

Knowing facts does not bring sanctification. Paul says that we should value our relationship with God (*I know Him and He knows me.*) over academic knowledge.

<sup>d</sup> **8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.** Here Paul brings up the catechism. We know that Hebrew children were brought up confessing the *shema* (meaning “Hear”) from the law of Moses:

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! Deuteronomy 6:4

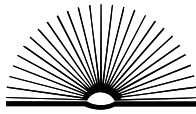
Fathers were (and are, Ephesians 6:4) given the responsibility to teach their children the Scriptures and the theology found there. That is the starting point for Paul’s argument. If we believe the Scriptures we know that there is only one God.

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians  
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gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords<sup>e</sup>, <sup>6</sup>yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him<sup>f</sup>

<sup>7</sup>However not all men have this knowledge<sup>g</sup>; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled<sup>h</sup>. <sup>8</sup>But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat<sup>i</sup>. <sup>9</sup>But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak<sup>j</sup>. <sup>10</sup>For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols<sup>k</sup>? <sup>11</sup>For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died<sup>l</sup>. <sup>12</sup>And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak,

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<sup>e</sup> 8:5 **For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords.** The Hebrews were trained with the knowledge of one God but most of the Gentiles were taught that there were many gods. Our ancestors have created many objects of worship called gods. From heavenly bodies to earthly objects and creatures, men are wired to adore what seems worthy of adoration.

<sup>f</sup> 8:6 **yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.** Followers of Christ from among Jews and Gentiles confess that there is there only one God and they also confess that He is both our Creator and our Master.

<sup>g</sup> 8:7 **However not all men have this knowledge.** The task of the church is to introduce people to the truth regarding an intimate knowledge of this God. Paul later scolded the church for failing to teach the truth about the risen Savior.

Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame. 1 Corinthians 15:34

<sup>h</sup> 8:7 **but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.** The words “being accustomed” come from a word that normally speaks of intimate acquaintance or customary practice. The trouble was that some people—even believers in Christ—still knew more about idol worship than the worship of the living God. They still associated the meat eating with the worship practices of their old life. This could be compared to the way your mind resists drinking from a container that has been used for something disgusting even though you know it has been thoroughly sterilized.

<sup>i</sup> 8:8 **But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.** The simple fact is that neither food nor fasting draw us close to God. But this truth alone does not make the decision for us.

<sup>j</sup> 8:9 **But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.** The “stumbling block” is not evil in itself. It might be compared to a knife that does good or evil depending on the context. Liberty to eat meat at a bargain price is a blessing. But forced on a weak person it may be destructive.

<sup>k</sup> 8:10 **For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?** Your main task in Christian fellowship is not to get everyone in the church to share your opinions. You may know people whose consciences keep them from enjoying many things that God has given us to enjoy. If you push them into violating their conscience they are sinning. That means you are sinning.

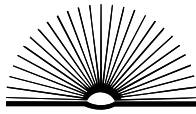
<sup>l</sup> 8:11 **For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.** The “ruin” can mean eternal ruin or it can simply mean great loss. In this context, since it speaks of someone rescued from sin by Christ, Paul talks of bringing another to sin.

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you sin against Christ<sup>m</sup>. <sup>13</sup>Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble<sup>n, o</sup>.

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<sup>m</sup> 8:12 **And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.** Loving God results in loving your neighbor. It is sin to encourage others to violate their consciences even if you know that their conscience is untrained.

<sup>n</sup> 8:13 **Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.** Paul uses one illustration, but his point is broad. It is worth great sacrifice to protect the others in church from sin. Our Lord had strong words for those who lure others into sin:

And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Matthew 18:5-6

<sup>o</sup> 8:7-13 When Paul told unmarried people that many of them could marry without sinning, he introduced the concept of Christian liberty. Many believers never grasp this concept and a few are never taught. There are many things that are always sinful. Paul is telling us that there are also matters the Scripture does not directly address in which we must factor more than commands into our decisions. How to make decisions on matters when you have no commandment in the Scripture:

1. Guard against approaching the matter pridefully. There are more important things in the Christian life than understanding concepts.
2. Prioritize having a right heart over being right. If you cultivate your relationship with God you will refrain from speaking your opinion every time you have one.
3. Remember that not every believer has been given the advantages you have. Do not be impatient with someone who has not yet learned what you just learned yesterday.
4. Make your decisions with others in mind. This is not fear of man. This is love of brothers.

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