

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS 8

In this chapter the apostle proceeds to consider the case of eating things offered to idols, which, though an indifferent thing, was abused by many in the Corinthian church, to the scandal and hurt of weak Christians; wherefore the apostle dissuades from the use of it, and refutes the arguments which were used by them in defence of their practice. And the general foundation on which they proceeded being their knowledge of Christian liberty, he begins with that; and makes answer to it, by granting, that he, and they, and all had knowledge in general; and by distinguishing between knowledge and charity, the one puffing up, and the other edifying: wherefore to argue from the one, to the disuse of the other, was wrong, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:1) seeing that kind of knowledge, which was not accompanied with love, was no true knowledge, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:2) but that was right which had annexed to it love to God, and our neighbour, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:3) and then applies this observation to the case of things offered to idols; and explains the knowledge which some had, and boasted of, that an idol was nothing, and that there was but one God, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:4) which latter he proves and confirms, partly by allowing that there were many nominal gods and lords, both in heaven and earth; but then they were only so by name, not by nature, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:5) and partly by observing the common faith of Christians, that there is but one God, and one Lord Jesus, who are both described by their names and properties, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:6) But now, though there was such knowledge concerning an idol, as nothing, and things offered to it, as indifferent, in some, this was not the case of all; who, as their knowledge was small, their consciences were weak, and were defiled by eating such things through the example of others, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:7) wherefore it became such who had greater knowledge to abstain from eating them; partly from the unprofitableness of such eating to them with respect to divine acceptance, it making them neither better nor worse, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:8) and partly from the harmfulness of it to others, it being a stumblingblock to the weak, which ought not to be laid in their way, (~~AKB~~1 Corinthians 8:9) and emboldening to do so likewise to the injury of their

weak consciences, (~~418D~~ 1 Corinthians 8:10) and so was to the loss and ruin of their peace and comfort, which is aggravated by their being brethren, and such for whom Christ died, (~~418D~~ 1 Corinthians 8:11). Thus by wounding their weak consciences, they that drew them into this practice, by their example, sinned both against their brethren, and Christ himself, (~~418D~~ 1 Corinthians 8:12). From all which the apostle concludes, that rather than offend a weak brother, it was right never to eat any flesh at all; and this he strengthens by his own example and resolution, (~~418B~~ 1 Corinthians 8:13).

Ver. 1. *Now as touching things offered unto idols*, etc.] This was another of the things the Corinthians wrote to the apostle about, desiring to have his judgment in; it was a controversy that had been before moved, whether it was lawful to eat things that had been sacrificed to idols. This was considered in the council at Jerusalem, (~~415B~~ Acts 15:28,29) and it was agreed to, for the peace of the churches, that the Gentiles, among other things, be advised to abstain from them; which, it seems, the church at Corinth knew nothing of, for the controversy was now moved among them: some that were weak in the faith, and had not, at least, clear notions of Gospel liberty, thought it very criminal and sinful to eat them; others that had, or boasted they had, more knowledge, would not only eat them privately at home, having bought them of the Heathen priests, or in the common meat markets, where they were exposed to sale, and at public feasts, to which they were invited by their friends; but would even go into an idol's temple, and sit and eat them there, to the great grief and prejudice of weak Christians; and what they had to plead in their own defence was their knowledge, to which the apostle here replies:

we know that we all have knowledge; said either affirmatively and seriously; and the meaning is, that the apostles and other Christians knew, and were conscious to themselves of their light and knowledge, and were assured, and might affirm with confidence, that they all, or the most part, only some few excepted, (see ~~418D~~ 1 Corinthians 8:7) had the same knowledge of Christian liberty as they had; knew that an idol was nothing, and that eating meats offered to them could not defile, or do them any hurt; for they were very sensible there was nothing common or unclean of itself, and yet did not think fit to make use of their knowledge to the grieving and wounding of their fellow Christians: or else this is said ironically, we are wise folks; you particularly are men of knowledge, and wisdom will die with you; you know that you know; you are very knowing in your own

conceits, and very positive as to your knowledge. It was the saying of Socrates, that that this one thing he knew, that he knew nothing; but men wise in their own opinions know everything:

knowledge puffeth up; not true knowledge; not that which comes from above, which is gentle and easy to be entreated; not sanctified knowledge, or that which has the grace of God going along with it; that makes men humble, and will not suffer them to be puffed up one against another; but a mere show of knowledge, knowledge in conceit, mere notional and speculative knowledge, that which is destitute of charity or love:

but charity edifieth; that is, a man that has knowledge, joined with love to God, and his fellow Christians, will seek for that which makes for the edification of others; and without this all his knowledge will be of no avail, and he himself be nothing.

Ver. 2. *And if any man think that he knows anything*, etc.] Whoever has an opinion of himself, or is conceited with his own knowledge, and fancies that he knows more than he does; which is always the case of those that are elated with their knowledge, and treat others with contempt, and have no regard to their peace and edification:

he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know; if he did, he would know this, that he ought to consult the peace, comfort, and edification of his brother; and therefore whatever knowledge he may fancy he has attained to, or whatever he may be capable of, and hereafter obtain, for the present he must be put down for a man that knows nothing as he should do; for he knows neither his duty to God nor man; if he knew the former, he would know the latter.

Ver. 3. *But if any man love God*, etc.] As they do, and show it, who love their brethren, and are careful not to grieve them; and make use of their superior knowledge, not for their destruction, but edification:

the same is known of him; is taught by him, made to know more by him; such an one increases in spiritual knowledge, or he is highly approved of, esteemed, and beloved by God: he takes a special and particular notice of him, manifests his love to him, and will own and acknowledge him another day, when proud, haughty, overbearing, and hard hearted professors, will be rejected by him.

Ver. 4. *As concerning therefore the eating of those things*, etc.] The apostle having enlarged on the head of knowledge, which those who made an ill use of their Christian liberty urged in favour of their conduct; he returns to the subject in question, in relation to meats,

that are offered in sacrifice unto idols. The determinations of the Jewish schools concerning this affair are as follow, which admit of no manner of profit by them in any shape:

“a beast, the whole of which they offer to idols, is forbidden of profit, even its dung, and its bones, and its horns, and its hoofs, and its skin, all is forbid to be of any profit”^{f143}.

Again^{f144},

“flesh or wine, or fruits, which are brought in to be offered up to idols, are not forbidden to profit with, although they are brought into the idol’s temple, until they offer them up before it; **hynpl mwbyrqh** “but when offered up before it”; they become an offering; and though they may return them, and bring them out, lo, these are forbidden for ever; and all that is found in an idol’s temple, even water and salt, are forbidden of profit by the law, **l k wnmml kwaw**, “and he that eats anything thereof” is to be beaten.”

Once more^{f145},

“an Israelite that lifts up a cheese to worship it, but does not worship it, but a Gentile worships it, it is forbidden of profit, became the lifting of it up is an action; and so if he lifts up an egg, and a Gentile comes and worships it, it is forbidden; he that cuts a gourd, or any such thing, and worships it, it is forbidden, etc.”

But by these decrees we Christians are not bound;

we know that an idol is nothing in the world; among the things created by God in the world; for though the matter of it may be of God, the form is of men; nor has it any share in the government of the world: and though that of which it may be made, as gold, silver, brass, etc. is something; yet as it is a form and representation of God, it is nothing, because there can be no representation of the invisible God; it is nothing, that is, it has no divinity in it, it is no God. Though it may have an existence, as the sun, moon, and

stars, yet not divinity; and in that sense nothing. The apostle here speaks the language of the Jewish doctors, who say^{f146},

“why dost thou envy an idol? $\zeta mm hb \hat{y} a \zeta$, “since it is nothing, or there is nothing it.””

And again^{f147},

“the Rabbins say, since $\zeta mm z$ [$b \hat{y} a w$, “there is nothing in an idol”, why do they call them deities;”

Very likely the apostle may have reference to $\mu y l y l a$, the Hebrew word for idols, which signifies things of nought, that are good for nothing, are of no value, and are as nothing, (^{<2121>}Isaiah 2:20).

And that there is none other God but one. This clause may be considered either as a reason of the former, why an idol is nothing, is no deity, is no God, “for there is none other God but one”, as it may be rendered; or as a part of what believers know; for as they know an idol is nothing, so they know, both from reason and revelation, from the books of the Old and New Testament, that there is but one God, and consequently that idols are nothing, and that they cannot defile them, nor anything that is offered to them.

Ver. 5. *For though there be that are called gods,* etc.] That are so by name, though not by nature; who are called so in Scripture, as angels and magistrates, or by men, who give them such names, and account them so:

whether in heaven; as the sun, moon, and stars:

or in earth; as men who formerly lived on earth; or various creatures on earth, who have been accounted deities; or stocks and stones graven by man’s device:

as there be gods many: almost without number, as were among the Egyptians, Grecians, Romans, and others; yea, even among the Jews, who falling into idolatry, their gods were according to the number of their cities, (^{<2128>}Jeremiah 2:28)

and lords many; referring to the Baalim, or the several idols that went by the name of Baal, or lord, as Baal Peor, (^{<0213>}Numbers 25:3) Baal Zephon, (^{<0214>}Exodus 14:2) Baal Zebub, (^{<1102>}2 Kings 1:2) Baal Berith, (^{<0283>}Judges 8:33).

Ver. 6. *But to us there is but one God, the Father*, etc.] In this Christians and Jews agree with the best and wisest philosophers of the Gentiles, that there is but one God; which is clear from the perfections of God, as necessary existence, eternity, infinity, omnipotence, all-sufficiency, goodness, and perfection; from one first cause of all things; from the government of the world; and from the writings of the Old and New Testament: so that to us believers this point is out of all doubt; but who this one God is the Gentiles knew not, and the Jews are very ignorant of; but we Christians know him to be “the Father”; by whom meant either God essentially considered, the one God, Father, Son, and Spirit, called the Father, not in relation to any person in the Godhead, but in relation to the creatures: so this one God, Father, Son, and Spirit, is the Father of spirits, the creator of angels, and the souls of men, the God of all flesh, the Father of all the individuals of human nature, the Father or author of all the mercies and blessings the children of men enjoy. Or else personally considered, and so designs the first person in the Godhead, who is called so in relation to his Son, who is styled the only begotten of the Father: and when he is said to be the one God, it must be understood, not as exclusive of the Son and Spirit; for if the Son stands excluded in this clause from being the one God with the Father, by the same rule of interpretation, the Father, in the next clause must stand excluded from being the one Lord with Christ; but as dominion or lordship belongs to the Father, so deity to the Son, and also to the Spirit.

Of whom are all things; all created beings and things; angels are of him, are created by him, serve and worship him; devils are of him, and under him, and at his control, though they have rebelled against him; all mankind are of him, and are his offspring; the whole universe, the heavens, the earth, and seas, and all that in them are, are of him; all things in nature, providence, grace, and glory, come of him: he is the author of every mercy, temporal and spiritual.

And we in him: or “for him”: as creatures we are not only made by him, but live in him, and are supported in him, and by him, and are created for his glory: though this seems rather to respect what believers are, as new creatures; they are in God; they are interested in him as their covenant God, and in his everlasting and immutable love; they are engraven on his hands, and set as a seal on his heart; they are “into him”, as it may be rendered; they are brought into nearness to him, and communion with him;

and are “for him”, are chosen, redeemed, regenerated, and called for the glorifying of his grace, and to show forth his praise.

And one Lord Jesus Christ; so called, not to the exclusion of the Father and Spirit, but in opposition to the lords many before mentioned, and with respect to all his people. Christ is the one Lord of all, as he is God over all, the Creator and Former of all things; and he is so likewise as Mediator, having all power, dominion, and government put into his hands: he is, in a special sense, the one Lord of his people, and that by right of marriage to them; by right of redemption of them; through his being an head unto them, and King of them; and by a voluntary surrender of themselves to him, rejecting all other lords, as sin, Satan, and the world, who have formerly had dominion over them, they acknowledge him to be their one and only Lord:

by whom are all things; in nature; all the created beings of this, or the other world, whether visible or invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers, are by him; no creature was made without him, and all by him; and all things in grace, our election, redemption, reconciliation, pardon, justification, and everlasting glory and happiness,

And we by him; we are redeemed by him from sin, Satan, the law, death, and hell; we are by him what we are, as Christians, as believers in him; by him, and from him, we have all the grace and the supplies of it we have; by him we have access to the Father, and fellowship with him; by him we are governed, influenced, protected, and preserved to his kingdom and glory; and by him we are, and shall be, saved with an everlasting salvation.

Ver. 7. *Howbeit, there is not in every man that knowledge*, etc.] The apostle is not speaking of Heathens, in whom there was no knowledge of the one true God, the author of all things, and of the one Lord Jesus, the only saviour and Redeemer; but of Christians, in whom there was the knowledge of these things, but not in all of them; the knowledge of this, that an idol was nothing; for though they knew that an idol was not God, and had no true deity in it, nor was it any true representation of God, yet fancied that it had an influence upon food that was offered to it, to defile it, and render it unclean, so that it ought not to be eaten; and since there were such persons that were so ignorant and weak, it became those who had more knowledge to be careful how they laid stumblingblocks in the way of such, to the prejudice of their consciences: that there were such, the apostle affirms,

for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; that is, there were some persons even at that very time, though they had been so long converted from Heathenism to Christianity, yet had such an opinion of an idol, that they really thought in their own consciences, that there were something in an idol, they could not well tell what, that defiled meats offered to it, and made them unlawful to be eaten; and yet, through the influence of the example of others, were prevailed upon to eat of them, having at the same time a notion of such food, as if it was not common food, but had received some virtue from the idol; and not without some regret, and uneasiness of mind, as being polluted with it. The Alexandrian copy, and some others, read, *συνήθεια* “through custom of the idol”; and so the Ethiopic version seems to have read: and the sense is, that some having been formerly accustomed to worship idols, and to eat things offered to them, as having received some virtue from them, still retained an opinion, that there was some difference between such meats and others.

And their conscience being weak is defiled; because such act against the dictates of their own conscience; which, though weak, is binding, and sinned against, defiles, according to the rules given by the apostle, (~~6144~~ Romans 14:14,23).

Ver. 8. *But meat commendeth us not to God*, etc.] These words are said by the apostle, either as expressing the argument of such as had knowledge in favour of themselves, that what they did was a thing indifferent, by which they were made neither better nor worse; nor did they look upon it as meritorious, or expect any favour from God on account of it, and therefore were not to be blamed for using their liberty in the manner they did: or else they are spoken by him as his own sense: and the meaning is, that eating of meat, any sort of meat, and so that which is offered to idols, or abstinence from it, neither one nor the other recommends any to the love and favour of God; *abrqm al* , “does not bring near”, or give access to God, as the Syriac version renders the phrase; does not ingratiate any into his affectionate regards, or make them acceptable unto him:

for neither if we eat are we the better; or “abound”, not in earthly but spiritual things, in the graces of the Spirit, and particularly in the esteem and good will of God, upon which such an action can have no influence:

neither if we eat not are we the worse; or are deficient; meaning not in temporal things, but, as before, in spiritual; true grace and piety are not a whit the less; nor are such persons less in the love and favour of God, which is not to be known and judged of by any such action, or the omission of it.

Ver. 9. *But take heed lest by any means*, etc.] This is either a reply to the instance of such as argued in favour of eating things offered to idols; or a limitation and explanation of the apostle's own concession, that it made a man, with respect to the favour of God, neither better nor worse: yet care should be taken, lest

this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak; he owns they had a liberty, or a right, or power, as the word may be rendered, of eating, or not eating, as they pleased; but then they ought to be cautious, lest they should be the means of offending, or causing to offend, such who were weak in the faith, and had not that knowledge of Christian liberty they had: not the use of their power and liberty is here denied, but the abuse of it is guarded against; for though the action itself was indifferent, yet as it might be used, it might be sinful, being attended with very bad consequences, such as hereafter mentioned.

Ver. 10. *For if any man see thee which hast knowledge*, etc.] That is, not any person whatever; not one that has equal knowledge, and can with a good conscience take the same liberty; but one that is weak in the faith, that has not such a clear sight of the doctrine of Christian liberty: if such an one should observe one that is famous for his superior abilities, learning, and knowledge,

sit at meat in the idol's temple; or at table, or at a feast, where, it seem, after the sacrifice was over, a feast was made of what was left, and friends were invited to partake of it; and some such there were in this church, who to show their Christian liberty, and their knowledge of it, would go and sit down at these feasts publicly, looking upon such meats as having nothing different from common food, or what they bought in the markets, or brought up as their own:

shall not the conscience of him that is weak; in knowledge, who is not clearly instructed in the doctrine of Christian liberty, but has some doubts upon his mind whether it is lawful to eat such meats, imagining them to be polluted by the idol: "be emboldened"; Greek for "edified"; that is, induced

by such an example, and confirmed by such an instance with boldness, and without fear, to eat those things which are offered to idols, contrary to his light, and knowledge, and conscience; and so upon a reflection on what he has done, wound his weak conscience, destroy his peace, and distress his soul. This the apostle proposes to the consideration of these men of knowledge and liberty, as what might be the case, and which they could not well deny, to dissuade them from the use of their liberty, in all places and times, and under all circumstances; all which ought to be seriously weighed and attended to in this business.

Ver. 11. *And through thy knowledge*, etc.] These words contain an aggravation of the sin such persons are guilty of, who are the means, by their example, of ensnaring weak minds, and causing them to stumble and fall, even in some sense so as to perish:

shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? every word almost carries in it an exaggeration of this matter; it is not some slight injury that is done to the person, but even causing him to “perish”; and this is not said of any person, but a “brother”, to whom the strongest affection, and strictest regard, should be shown; and a “weak” brother, of whom the greater care should be taken; and therefore it is an instance of cruelty to do damage to such an one, and that not ignorantly, which cannot be pretended, but “through thy knowledge”; not through the true use, but abuse of it: those that have knowledge should know better, and improve it to the edification, and not the destruction of fellow Christians; and all this done in a case of indifference, that might as well be let alone, of which there was no necessity for the doing of it: but what aggravates most of all is, that this affects a person for “whom Christ died”; that he had such a value for as to purchase and redeem with the price of his own blood; and yet these men made so little account of, as by so trifling a thing to risk their good and welfare. Some would from hence conclude the doctrine of universal redemption, that Christ died for all men, even for them that perish; but it should be observed, that the words are put by way of interrogation, and prove no matter of fact, even supposing they could be understood of eternal ruin and destruction; and at most only imply the danger and possibility thereof through offences given, were they not preserved by the power and grace of God through Christ, who died for them, and so will not suffer them to perish; though this is no thanks to them who lay stumblingblocks in their way, and, as much as in them lies, cause them to perish, in this sense: besides, the “perishing” of this weak brother is to be

understood of his peace and comfort, and is explained by “defiling” his conscience, (~~4812~~1 Corinthians 8:7) by wounding it, (~~4812~~1 Corinthians 8:12) and making him to offend, (~~4812~~1 Corinthians 8:13) through an imprudent use of Christian liberty in those who had the greater knowledge, and by a participation of things offered unto idols, in an idol’s temple, and not of his eternal damnation in hell; which could never enter into the apostle’s thought, as to be brought about hereby, as appears from (~~4812~~1 Corinthians 8:8) and so is no proof of Christ’s dying for such as perish eternally: for those for whom Christ has died, he has by his death procured such blessings for them, as a justifying righteousness, pardon of sin, peace with God, reconciliation unto him, and eternal salvation, which will for ever secure them from perishing in such sense.

Ver. 12. *But when ye sin so against the brethren*, etc.] Through sitting at meat in an idol’s temple, and thereby violating the new commandment of love; by which saints are obliged to love one another as brethren, and take care to do nothing that may hurt and prejudice one another’s peace and comfort, it being an incumbent duty upon them by love to serve one another: and

wound their weak conscience: as before observed: it is contrary to the law of love to wound a brother; it is an aggravation of the sin to wound a weak one; what greater cruelty than to strike or beat, as the word here used signifies, a sick and infirm man? and greater still to strike and wound his conscience than any part of his body; for a wounded spirit is insupportable without divine aid and influence; and what serves most to enhance the crime and guilt is,

ye sin against Christ, who has so loved this weak brother as to die for him; and between whom there is so close an union, as between head and members; and from whence such a sympathy arises, that what is done to or against such a person, Christ takes as done to himself. The Syriac version emphatically adds, *wh*, “himself”.

Ver. 13. *Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend*, etc.] This is the conclusion of the whole, which the apostle makes with respect to himself, and proposes for the imitation of others; that since an imprudent use of Christian liberty, in this article of eating things offered to idols, might be attended with such bad consequences, as to lay a stumblingblock in the way of weak Christians, and be a means of emboldening them to do things

contrary to their consciences, and so break the peace of their minds, wound their spirits, grieve and afflict their souls, and not only so, but so to do would be to sin against Christ himself; rather than do any of these things, or be accessory to them, he determines, in the strength of divine grace, that

he will eat no flesh while the world standeth; or “for ever”: not only he resolves he will not eat flesh offered to idols, but no other flesh, if this was an offence to a weak brother; and he not only concludes to abstain a few days, or months, or years, but as long as he should live in the world: he chose rather to live on herbs, or any other food but this,

lest, says he,

I make my brother to offend: this is truly Christian charity, a proof of brotherly love, and it shows a concern for the peace and welfare of others, when a person foregoes his own right, and drops the use of his liberty, rather than grieve, wound, and offend a brother in Christ.