

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

X. Protecting The Consciences Of Fellow Believers

(1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul discipled in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid*.
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. In 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Paul handled a delicate issue where mature believers had total liberty before the Lord but where exercising that liberty offended the consciences of immature believers, influencing them to sin.
- D. We study the passage for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Protecting The Consciences Of Fellow Believers, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.

- A. Paul addressed some questions his readers at Corinth had on meat that was offered to idols, 1 Cor. 8:1a. To explain, "(o)rdinarily the Greeks and Romans burned the less desirable portions of an animal in . . . their sacrifices and retained the choicer parts for personal consumption at banquets celebrating the sacrifices. If a sacrifice were made in connection with a state function, the meat which remained was frequently sold in the marketplace." B. K. C., N. T., p. 521. The availability of this meat and its use or abuse as to how it affected one's personal liberty in Christ and the consciences of other believers is discussed in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1.
- B. Thus, to start handling this matter, in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Paul dealt with the idea of eating meat that had been offered to idols in view of the conscience of a weaker believer who considered that action to be idolatry:
 - 1. Some of the Corinthian believers claimed to have the knowledge needed to eat meat that had been offered to idols without hurting their consciences since they knew it was sanctioned by God, 1 Corinthians 8:1a,b.
 - 2. However, some in this group were not tempering that knowledge with love for weaker fellow believers, for they were proudly exalting their knowledge by eating such meat with disregard for how it affected others, so Paul critiqued such "knowledge" as being an insufficient knowledge, 1 Corinthians 8:1c-3.
 - 3. Accordingly, dealing with the issue of eating meat offered to idols, Paul clarified that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there was only One True God Who created all that exists, Whose Son was Jesus Christ our Savior, and we are saved by Him and exist by Him, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. The implication is that there is intrinsically nothing wrong with eating meat that had been offered to what was no real god.
 - 4. However, not every believer who had been saved out of paganism had that knowledge, for some believers in Paul's era believed that what had been offered to an idol belonged to that false god, that then eating the meat that had been offered to that idol was idolatry in violation of his conscience, 1 Corinthians 8:7.
 - 5. On the other hand, Paul noted that eating meat offered to idols did not affect one's relationship with God, for eating it did not make one better nor did abstaining from eating it make one worse, 1 Corinthians 8:8.
 - 6. However, those believers who knew that eating such meat in itself was totally acceptable before God were to watch that using their liberty in Christ to eat such meat might not become a stumbling block to weaker fellow believers fresh out of paganism, 1 Corinthians 8:9. Thus, if an immature believer saw a believer who felt he had liberty to eat meat offered to idols eat such meat in an idol temple, the conscience of the weaker believer would be emboldened to allow him to eat things offered to idols, causing him to commit idolatry because of the knowledge that was misapplied by the strong believer, 1 Corinthians 8:10-11a. The Greek word rendered "perish" (KJV) is *apollytai*, what often refers to physical death (Matthew 2:13; Acts 5:37) and likely implies the sin unto death for the weaker brother who is emboldened to participate in what he views is idolatry, which is an excommunicable sin according 1 Corinthians 5:11-13.
 - 7. For a stronger believer to lead a weaker brother in Christ for whom Christ died to commit a sin unto death was itself a terrible sin against Christ (1 Corinthians 8:11b-12), so stronger believers were not to wound the consciences of weaker believers even if it involved never eating such meat again, 1 Corinthians 8:13.

Lesson: *Mature believers cannot use their Biblical liberties to lead weak believers to sin against their consciences. Rather, mature believers must protect the consciences of weaker brethren by tempering the use of their liberties.*

Application: *May we temper the use of our Biblical liberties to keep from influencing immature believers to sin.*