

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part XVIII: Personal Liberty And Protecting A Weaker Brother's Conscience

(1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

I. Introduction

- A. One mark of spiritual vitality is the capacity to exercise the liberty one has in Christ, but to abstain from exercising that liberty to avoid wounding the conscience of a weaker believer who lacks Biblical knowledge.
- B. All believers need to know and apply this truth, so we view Paul's teaching on it in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13:

II. Personal Liberty And Protecting A Weaker Brother's Conscience, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.

- A. To understand the issues in this passage about which Paul wrote, we note that in the ancient Roman world, if a sacrifice was made "in connection to a state function, the meat which remained was frequently sold in the marketplace," and anyone could purchase it there as regular food, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 521.
- B. The question as to if believers were allowed of God to buy this meat then arose, so Paul claimed that he and some readers had knowledge that there was no intrinsic quality to the meat that was offered to idols, that there really is no real idol since only God is God, 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to 1 Cor. 8:4.
- C. Unfortunately, in claiming that he and some of his readers had this knowledge, Paul critiqued that some of his readers were proud about that knowledge, so he worked to counter their arrogance in 1 Corinthians 8:1b-3:
 - 1. Paul explained that knowledge of spiritual things had a tendency to make immature believers proud of their knowledge where love edified, making love for another brother better than knowledge, 1 Cor. 8:1b.
 - 2. Also, if a believer thinks he knows a lot of spiritual truth, he does not know what he ought to know due to the way sin has limited his learning anyway, what is a very humbling thought, 1 Corinthians 8:2.
 - 3. In addition, true knowledge always leads to God and one's love for Him, which of necessity leads to a love of a brother in Christ, what counters any pride in true knowledge, 1 Corinthians 8:3.
- D. Returning to his initial topic of discussing meat offered to idols, Paul clarified that not every believer knew that there was only one true God, that there was no such thing as a true idol, 1 Corinthians 8:7a. Thus, when a believer who lacked this knowledge ate meat that had been offered to an idol, he practiced idolatry, so eating the meat defiled his conscience as a weak believer, causing him to sin in a very vile way, 1 Corinthians 8:7b.
- E. Yet, meat does not "present us" (*paristemi*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., p. 633) to God: that is, (1) abstaining from eating it does not itself cause us spiritually to "be inferior" (*husterero*, Ibid., p. 856-857) (2) nor does ingesting it cause us spiritually to "abound" (*perisseuo*, Ibid., p. 656-657), 1 Cor. 8:8.
- F. However, Paul warned that we not let the liberty we have by this knowledge be applied in a way that creates a stumblingblock to believers who lack such knowledge (1 Cor. 8:9), and he explained this in 1 Cor. 8:10-12:
 - 1. If a believer who had no knowledge that idols were really nothing so that the meat offered to them had no innate spiritual significance were to see a believer who had this knowledge exercise his liberty sitting at the idol temple eating such meat, the weaker brother's conscience would be emboldened to eat things that he believed carried spiritual value in the eating since they had been offered to idols, 1 Corinthians 8:10.
 - 2. Thus, through the informed believer's knowledge and unwise exercise of his liberty to eat the meat offered to idols, he causes the uninformed believer to sin when the latter actually practices idolatry, what eventually leads to his physical death in divine discipline, 1 Corinthians 8:11; 1 John 5:16-17; The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, 1971, p. 1242.
 - 3. When a liberated, informed believer thus sins against the brother with the weaker conscience by wounding his sense of right and wrong in his conscience, he actually sins against Christ, 1 Corinthians 8:12.
- G. Thus, Paul summed that if eating meat caused his weaker brother to stumble in sin in his mind and heart, in no way would Paul eat meat again, that he might not cause his brother to sin, 1 Corinthians 8:13.

Lesson: *There is nothing innately spiritually effectual in meat that is offered to idols, for there is no deity but the true God of Scripture, and such knowledge gives the believer liberty to eat such meat. However, some believers lack this knowledge, and for the informed to exercise his liberty to eat such meat in front of his weaker brother in Christ causes the latter to be tempted to eat the meat in faith that he is gaining favor from the idol, causing him to practice idolatry and harming his walk with the Lord. Thus, love leads the stronger believer to avoid exercising his right to eat meat offered to idols in front of the weak so as to protect the weaker brother's conscience.*

Application: *If we know a truth that gives us liberty to perform a deed that causes an observing, ignorant brother to be tripped into sinning, God wants us to exercise love in the matter and not practice that deed before the brother.*