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1 Corinthians 8 Paraphrased



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† This chapter addresses a real issue the early believers faced, food that had been sacrificed to idols.

† Paul explains that knowledge alone is not enough, love must guide how believers treat one another (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

† The discussion also shows the difference between intellectual understanding and spiritual maturity in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:1

Now about food sacrificed to idols, we know that all of us have knowledge. But knowledge by itself can make a person arrogant, while love builds others up.

† Paul starts by acknowledging that believers understood idols had no real power, but knowledge without love can produce pride (1 Corinthians 13:4).

† The problem in Corinth wasn't the food itself, it was how believers treated weaker brethren who struggled with the issue (Romans 14:15).

† Clement of Alexandria wrote that true knowledge must always be governed by love so that believers don't harm the conscience of others.

1 Corinthians 8:2

If someone thinks he understands everything, he hasn't yet come to know as he ought to know.

† Paul reminds them that spiritual knowledge requires humility, not arrogance (1 Corinthians 13:12).

† The person who claims complete understanding shows that he hasn't yet grasped the full depth of God's wisdom.

† Irenaeus warned that pride in knowledge was one of the earliest dangers facing the church.

1 Corinthians 8:3

But if anyone loves God, that person is known by Him.

† Love is the true evidence of a relationship with God, not merely having correct information (1 John 4:7-8).

† Being known by God reflects covenant relationship rather than intellectual achievement.

† Eusebius recorded that the earliest Christians measured maturity by love for God and neighbor.

1 Corinthians 8:4

So concerning eating food sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God except one.

† Paul affirms strict monotheism, idols were powerless statues

with no real existence (Isaiah 44:9-20).

† This knowledge was correct, but it didn't mean everyone could act on it without harming others.

† Early Christian writers consistently taught that idols were empty images without divine power.

1 Corinthians 8:5

Even if there are things called gods in heaven or on earth, and there are many so called gods and many so called lords,

† Paul recognizes the pagan world was filled with many deities and religious systems.

† These were only called gods by men, not actual divine beings (Jeremiah 10:11).

† Justin Martyr wrote that pagan religions created countless gods, but none were the true Creator.

1 Corinthians 8:6

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things exist and for whom we live, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist and through whom we live.

† This statement echoes the Shema of Israel, affirming one God while identifying Jesus as Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4).

† Paul shows the unity of the Father and Christ in creation and redemption (Colossians 1:16).

† Early Christians repeatedly used this verse to defend monotheism and the authority of Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:7

However, not everyone has this knowledge. Some people are so used to idols that when they eat such food they still think of it as sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience becomes defiled because it is weak.

† Some believers had recently left pagan worship, so eating idol food triggered their old associations.

† Even though the idol was nothing, their conscience still felt they were participating in idolatry (Romans 14:23).

† Tertullian explained that new converts often struggled with

habits formed during their former pagan life.

1 Corinthians 8:8

Food doesn't bring us closer to God. We aren't worse if we don't eat it, and we aren't better if we do.

† Paul makes it clear that food has no spiritual power to change our standing with God (Mark 7:18-19).

† The kingdom of God isn't based on dietary choices but on righteousness and peace (Romans 14:17).

† The issue therefore wasn't the food itself, but how believers affected one another.

1 Corinthians 8:9

But be careful that your freedom doesn't become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

† Christian liberty must always be guided by concern for others (Galatians 5:13).

† A stumbling block means causing another believer to fall into sin or violate his conscience.

† Early church teachers repeatedly warned that freedom without love could damage the unity of the church.

1 Corinthians 8:10

If someone with a weak conscience sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be encouraged to eat what is sacrificed to idols?

† The weaker believer might imitate the stronger believer even though he still believes the act is wrong.

† In that case the person sins because he acts against his conscience (Romans 14:23).

† This shows why love must guide how believers exercise their freedom.

1 Corinthians 8:11

And because of your knowledge the weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.

† Paul stresses the seriousness of harming another believer's

faith.

† Christ died for that person, so their spiritual well being must matter to us (Romans 14:15).

† The early church emphasized protecting the spiritual growth of new believers.

1 Corinthians 8:12

When you sin against the brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

† Harming a fellow believer is treated as sin against Christ Himself (Matthew 25:40).

† The church is Christ's body, so what affects one member affects the whole body (1 Corinthians 12:26).

† This teaching reinforced the seriousness of Christian responsibility toward others.

1 Corinthians 8:13

Therefore if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again so that I won't cause my brother to fall.

† Paul concludes by giving his own example, he would give up personal freedom rather than harm another believer.

† Love is willing to sacrifice rights for the good of others (Philippians 2:3-4).

† This principle shaped early Christian community life and unity.

Historical References

† Clement of Alexandria wrote that true Christian knowledge must always serve love and the building up of the church.

† Irenaeus warned that pride in knowledge often leads believers away from humility and unity.

† Eusebius recorded that the earliest Christians avoided practices that could damage the conscience of new believers.

† Tertullian described how converts from paganism struggled with former religious practices and needed patience from the church.

How it applies to us today

† Knowledge alone isn't the goal of the Christian life, love for others must guide how we use what we know.

† Freedom in Christ should never be used in ways that harm another believer's conscience.

† Mature believers must protect and strengthen those who are still growing in their faith.

† Unity in the church comes when believers place love above personal rights.

† The lesson of this chapter reminds us that Christ died for every believer, so we must treat each other with care and respect.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why did Paul address food sacrificed to idols?

A: Because many believers in Corinth lived among pagan temples where such food was common, creating confusion for new converts.

Q: Was the food itself sinful?

A: No. Paul explained that idols were nothing and food didn't affect a believer's standing with God.

Q: Why did Paul still warn believers about eating it?

A: Because it could cause weaker believers to violate their conscience and fall into sin.

Q: What principle does Paul emphasize above knowledge?

A: Love that builds others up and protects their faith.

Q: What example did Paul give to demonstrate love?

A: He said he would completely give up eating meat if it caused a brother to stumble.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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