

Paul's First Letter to The Corinthians
Lesson 3

As we continue in the eighth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul continues answering questions that were asked in the letter which he had received from Chloe.

1 Cor. 8:¹ Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. ² If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; ³ but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. 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. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 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.

Things Sacrificed To Idols Are Nothing; However – There are those who are mature in the Lord, growing everyday, learning all the intent of the Lord, and there are those who are babes in Christ and never grow past the simple thoughts of their salvation. For those who are mature in the Lord, Paul states that they know that the meat which is sacrificed to idols is perfectly fine to consume for believers because there is absolutely no power in an idol. Idols of gold and silver, stone or clay are just man made images that are so-called gods with no power at all. The meat spoken of here was the left over meat that was not consumed either by the fire or in the sacrificial ceremony. It was common for this left over meat to be take home for personal use, given to the poor, or taken to the market to be sold for income. If a believer ate from the meat that was sacrificed to an idol, there would be no spell cast upon the person and there would be no problem with God if you ate the meat. However, if we go to the first council of Jerusalem in 50 AD we find that this was addressed by Paul, Peter, James, and the entire counsel.

Acts 15:28-29 "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: ²⁹ 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 21:25 "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

Why would Paul give an instruction that seemingly is in opposition to the decision made at the council? In the next few verses we will discover why this was the decision of the council as Paul gives us some background into that decision which was made in Jerusalem.

1 Cor. 8:⁷ However not all men have this knowledge; 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. 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. ⁹ But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? ¹¹ For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for

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whose sake Christ died. ¹²And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

Because of the Lack of Knowledge, Some Will Stumble – Paul states in [1 Cor. 6:12](#) “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.” This is one of those issues. There are often those in the congregation that are so limited in their knowledge of the Lord that some things, like the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, will cause great struggles in their hearts and minds. They do not understand that inanimate objects that are worshiped as idols carry absolutely no power at all. Yet, because of their past history and involvement with idols, anything associated with idols is detestable to them and causes them great consternation.

People are always watching you. There are those who know you are a Christian and you do not even know their name. They have heard all about you and your love for the Lord. They would love to get to know you, and they are even trying to get close to you just to say a word. Suppose you are on an airplane and that person just can not wait until the seatbelt sign is turned off so they can come speak to you. The drink orders were taken before takeoff and just as that person is near your seat to speak to you about the Lord, the stewardess brings your drink. It is red, in a clear cup, with a toothpick and an olive. The person’s heart is broken and they return to their seat thinking you are a hypocrite Christian. You are totally oblivious to the entire scene. You sit there enjoying your Vegetable V-8 while the front section of the plane grumbles about your drink. It has absolutely nothing to do with the facts; it all has to do with the perception. Your reputation is scared and you have caused a young Christian to stumble. With your knowledge of how the V-8 is presented, it would always be better to ask for the entire can so there is no cause for offense on anyone’s part. Never be arrogant with your knowledge. Even though you know it is not sinful, make sure it does not look sinful to someone else and cause them to stumble. While you may understand your liberty, you must be careful not to cause someone else to stumble so you can enjoy your liberty.

[1 Cor. 9:1](#) Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? ²If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

To Others I Am Not, At Least I Am To You – After establishing the importance of not being a stumbling block to those who are weaker in their faith, Paul moves on to speak of his liberty in preaching the gospel. To some he is an apostle. To others he is not an apostle. Paul has liberties as an apostle, but in order to win more to the Lord, he does not act on his liberties. Yet he will establish in this passage a system by which those whose lives are centered in spreading the gospel will have a way to provide for their daily bread, family, and basic needs.

[1 Cor. 9:3](#) My defense to those who examine me is this: ⁴Do we not have a right to eat and drink? ⁵Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? ⁶Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? ⁷Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? ⁸I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*. ¹¹If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too

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much if we should reap material things from you? ¹²If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. ¹³Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? ¹⁴So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. ¹⁵But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. ¹⁶For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. ¹⁷For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. ¹⁸What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Full Use of Paul's Right in the Gospel – Ministers of the gospel have rights and liberties that provide for their livelihood and families. For those from the family of Levi who served in the temple down through the years, their families were provided for by the sacrifices that were brought to the temple. Just as God instructed the priests in the temple, so did the Lord Jesus give orders for those who preach the gospel to live out of the gospel. When Jesus sends the Apostles out to spread the gospel, this is what He said.

Matthew 10:9-10 "Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, ¹⁰or a bag for *your* journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.

Luke 10:7-8 "And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. ⁸"And whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you;

Here and in the gospels, both Paul and Jesus made the argument for the minister to have a salary for his time of serving in the gospel ministry. Not only that, the minister has every right to eat, take a spouse, plant vineyard, tend the flock, and act as judges. Yet, Paul did not take advantage of his liberties in his ministry as a traveling evangelist so he would not be a burden or stumbling block to those whom he was trying to share the gospel.

1 Cor. 9:¹⁹For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. ²⁰And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. ²³And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

That I Might Win the More – It was Paul's desire to win as many souls to the Lord as he could. To do this he was careful not to be a stumbling block. To the Jews he would keep every Old Testament law even though he was free from that law in Jesus Christ so he could win them to the Lord. To the Gentles he kept their laws in order that they would accept him and he could lead them to the Lord. This does not mean that Paul would worship idols to win an idol worshiper! Rather,

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Paul would keep the customs of the people so that he would not offend them, so he could share the gospel with them.

1 Cor. 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. **25** And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. **26** Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; **27** but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

Run In Such a Way that You May Win – If Paul is going to win people to the Lord, he cannot do so by first causing them to stumble. Paul runs the race as an evangelist in such a way that he will win that person to the Lord and obtain an imperishable reward. When Paul states that he “buffets” his body, this means that he controls his desires in order to share the gospel. If he was to drop his guard and do something that might be deemed inappropriate, he would be disqualified.

1 Cor. 10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; **3** and all ate the same spiritual food; **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

The Rock was Christ – Speaking to the Jews in the congregation at Corinth, Paul reminds them of the heritage and the history of the Jews during the Exodus experience. In the book of Exodus we have seen each example that Paul expresses here. However, Paul enlightens us on one aspect that is not seen in the Exodus story. Paul reveals that the spiritual rock that the Jews drank from in the desert was Christ Jesus.

1 Cor. 10:5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. **6** Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. **7** And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.” **8** Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. **9** Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. **10** Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. **11** Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. **12** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. **13** No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

The Way of Escape – Paul now warns the Corinthians not to do the same things of which the Jews in the wilderness were guilty.

1. Do not crave evil things
2. Do not be idolaters
3. Do not act immorally
4. Do not try the Lord
5. Do not grumble

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Notice that Paul states that all the things that happened to the Jews were for the purpose of making an example for the “people of the age of grace” so that they will not fall into the same temptations. Temptations will come, but not to the point that you can not overcome the temptation. God will not allow such a great temptation in you life. He will provide a way for every believer to escape the temptation.

1 Cor. 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. 16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? 19 What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. 22 Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?

Do Not Become Sharers in Demons – Once again Paul made the case that anything sacrificed to idols is nothing at all. However, Paul now focuses on the reason that sacrifices are made to idols. It is because those who sacrifice to idols are sacrificing to demons. Therefore, believers should not participate in anything that deals with idols because it can be viewed by others that you are participating and sharing in the worship of demons. Participating in anything that is part of idolatry is a stumbling block to the gospel! You can not participate in demon worship and the worship of the Lord. The Jew who were guilty of idolatry in the wilderness Exodus died in the wilderness at the hand of the Lord. So to, the Lord will not stand for a believer to act like the devil and then attempt to worship like a saint. His judgment will come down on that person for the Lord is a jealous God.

1 Cor. 10:23 All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own *good*, but that of his neighbor. 25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience' sake; 26 FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you, without asking questions for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone should say to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat *it*, for the sake of the one who informed *you*, and for conscience' sake; 29 I mean not your own conscience, but the other *man's*; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? 31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of the many, that they may be saved.

The Other Man's Conscience - Finally coming full circle Paul ties the bow on this instruction. He repeats his words from 1 Corinthians 6:12 when he says “All things are lawful ...”. Then Paul ties it to the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. For believers we can freely eat anything sat in front of us. However, if we find out that the food has been sacrificed in a futile attempt to worship the devil, we are not to eat the food in their presence. This is not for our benefit, but for their benefit

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that we do not cause a stumbling block and be judged by the other man's conscience. We do this so that they might be saved.

1 Cor. 11:¹ Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Be Imitators – Paul implores the Corinthians to follow his example as he strives to not be a stumbling block to those who need the Lord. We all need examples in our lives. The quickest way to mature in the Lord is to imitate another who is truly mature. However, we should never think that Paul was the supreme example, because he was not. Christ was the supreme example and Paul was simply mature in Christ's example. By following Paul's lead, the Corinthians would be following Christ's lead. Be like Christ in all you do.

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