

1 Corinthians 8

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Tape #8143
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Shall we turn in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians, chapter eight, as we continue our journey through the Bible. Paul had established the church in Corinth, but after Paul left, a lot of problems arose. There developed divisions within the body of Christ. It is always a sad thing when the body of Christ becomes divided. Paul, speaking about the things of the ministry, the pressures that he had, the various experiences and difficulties, he said, and beside all these, the care of all of the churches that I have daily. So when he heard of the divisions and all, in the church in Corinth, it was just a burden on Paul's heart.

There were several issues. There were the issues of the abuse of the gift of the Spirit, which we will be getting to in chapters twelve and fourteen. There was the mixed up teaching concerning the resurrection and the division over the belief in the resurrection. He deals with that in chapter fifteen. There were marks of carnality. These divisions were a part of the marks of carnality. There was an abuse of the Lord's Supper and he deals with that.

Now there were divisions as far as Christian liberty is concerned and this is one of the things that he deals with in chapter eight. The divisions that had come because some people had felt a liberty to do anything, where others felt that certain things were wrong to do. Now the Lord hasn't in the Bible, spelled out every activity. In other words you don't find anything in the Bible that says you shouldn't go to movies. Why? It was because they didn't have movies in those days.

There are a lot of things where Christians are wondering, you know, is it all right for me as a Christian? There are some Christians who believe that it's all right to go to movies. There are others who are strongly opposed. There are those who believe that it's all right to smoke and there are others who believe that it is a sin. Others that believe that it is all right to have a little wine with your meal, beer with your pizza. There are others who feel that that is wrong.

A lot of times what we accept and what we don't accept has a lot to do with our culture, where we live. For instance in Europe, in Germany and all, it would really not be a shock for a church to have a beer party. It's just a part of their culture. They don't look upon it as something that is wrong. So there are those who have the feeling that they have a liberty to do certain things where others feel convictions against it and that is always the case. Thus, it creates sort of a division. I feel that I have liberty to do something. Someone else feels a conviction against that. So how are we to react to each other? There are some people who feel very convicted about going to a public beach. There are others who have no convictions about that at all. How are we to react toward each other when we have these strong differences of opinion of what I as a Christian can do and what I as a Christian should not do?

So someone had written to Paul, told him of the problems, so Paul is seeking to bring a balance to the church in Corinth. So referring to the letter, he said, *Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.* Paul in writing to the Romans (Romans chapter 14), said, those who are strong in the faith, eat meat. Those who are weak in the faith are vegetarians. So the person who eats meat should not look down on the vegetarian. Nor should the vegetarian judge the person who eats meats. God accepts all of us.

Now we have the issue of, if meat has been offered in a sacrifice in a pagan temple to one of the pagan deities. Can I as a Christian eat that meat? This subject Paul will come back to in the tenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. When you took a sacrifice to the priests in the pagan temple, to offer it to one of the pagan gods, part of the lamb would be sacrificed on the altar, part of it would be given to the priest as sort of his gratuity for offering it for you. Then part of it you were able to keep and use for your own personal family needs.

Now with the priests offering many sacrifices during the day, and getting a portion of each of the sacrifices, he would have more meat than he could possibly eat, so he would sell this extra meat to the

butcher shop. The butcher shops would have this meat along with the other meat in their cases for sale. It was usually just strung up, not in a case, but strung up and carved off as it is hanging there. Now in the tenth chapter, Paul said, when you go in to the butcher shop to buy meat, you see a good cut that you want, don't ask the butcher, was this sacrificed to an idol? Just buy it, go home and enjoy it. Don't ask questions about it, for your conscience sake. Because if he says yes, it came from the temple this morning, then if you ate it you might have pangs of conscience. It might trouble you. You might say oh, I've got a stomachache. I bet it's because I ate that piece of meat, you know, that was sacrificed. You know and you get those guilty feelings.

He said if someone invites you to dinner and the meat is there on the table. Don't ask them, just eat what is set before you, asking no questions, for your conscience sake. So he'll deal with that aspect of it in chapter ten, but in this chapter, he's dealing with the divisions that had developed because of those that felt the liberty to eat that meat. They said, well, we have knowledge, we understand, we know that these idols are nothing but marble or stone or perhaps wood. They're nothing! They are representing deities that don't exist. These gods that they are worshipping are not gods at all! They are the figments of their imagination. And so because these idols are only representing the figment of people's imagination, you know, it doesn't hurt to eat this meat that has been sacrificed to idols. We have the knowledge. But Paul said, knowledge puffs up.

This is so often the case. One of the tragic things about universities and all is the intellectual snobbery that is often developed around these institutions. All you have to do is to go to these institutions and you will see what Paul is declaring. Knowledge puffs up. People become very puffed up over their knowledge.

But Paul said, ²*And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.* You think that you are smart? You really know nothing. So little. Man, poor man, so ignorant in that which he knows best. The person who thinks he knows the most usually knows the least. Because the more you know, the more you know, you don't know! The vast amount of knowledge, multiplied by the computer and all of the communicative sciences that we have today, our total accumulated knowledge is just growing so rapidly.

All of the accumulated knowledge of man from the time of Adam until the year 1965, all of the knowledge of the sciences and all, that men have accumulated in that time, doubled in that next decade! Between 1965 and 1975, the accumulated knowledge of man has doubled, in just ten years. Now knowledge is doubling in less than five years. So that they say that ten years from now we presently only know five per cent of what man will know in ten years.

It sort of reminds of us of the tower of Babel. Where God spoke about their increased knowledge at that time as they were endeavoring to build this skyscraper. And He said that because of their knowledge nothing will be held back. That is when God intervened. They were not using their knowledge for the right purposes.

You know it's amazing what we can do now with e-mail. We can communicate with people around the world. We can bring into our computers just so much knowledge. But with this comes the opportunity to know so much evil. What can serve a good and wonderful purpose can be used to destroy a man's mind, to fill it with pollution.

Now I'm excited about the potential of the Internet. We have our Calvary Chapel web page. People can dial in and they can pull down the whole 5000 series of our commentaries through the Bible. They can listen in Japan, live, to the sermon that you are hearing here. We get letters from people in Japan and Europe and around the world, who are tuning to our Calvary Chapel web and are listening to the services. They are hearing them as you are hearing them. That's amazing! It's marvelous technology! It has great potential for getting the Word of God out!

With the new CD-ROMs we will be able to put on three CD-ROMs, the entire 5000 series of commentaries through the whole Bible. In fact we are in the process of doing that right now. Imagine what that is going to mean, as far as getting the Word of God out? Rather than smuggling Bibles into China, all we will have to do is to take a bunch of CD-ROMs in the suitcase. And they will not only have "Through the Bible", they will have the teaching and the commentary, which the Chinese are sending out and saying,

oh, we need the teaching of the Word. You know, we need the teaching of the Word, desperately. Well, we will soon be able to get it into them on the CD-ROMs. It is glorious, marvelous, the technology, what knowledge is affording us to do today in spreading the gospel.

As we are speaking here tonight, it's being carried on a line to Twin Falls, Idaho, where it is beamed up to a satellite, some fifty-three thousand miles out there in space. From the satellite it is being directed back down to little transmitters across the United States. We have some fifty-four stations now that are picking up the broadcasts from the satellite, so that while we are sitting here tonight studying the Word, people all over the United States, can be tuning in and listening to the Bible study that we have here. And they are listening! That's marvelous, that God has afforded us this technology!

But the problem is, what can be used for good, is also being used for evil. And so the availability for evil is so prevalent through the Internet. The horrible, horrible, mind polluting junk, that is available. Knowledge, it puffs up. If you think you know anything, ten years from now you will know nothing, compared with what is able to be known or what has been discovered, the vast accumulation of knowledge.

³*But if anyone loves God,* (It is not what you know, that really counts. It's your love for God. That's where it's really at.)

this one is known by Him. The same is known of God. God knows you. His child, He's concerned for you. He watches over you. Now, the fascinating thing to me is that with all of the knowledge that we are obtaining and achieving, it's not a drop in the bucket to all that God knows! We are only discovering what God already knew. One of the characteristics or one of the attributes of God is His all-knowledge, His omniscience. He knows all science. It's interesting that a lot of the things that we are discovering are things that have existed. We're just now discovering them. But God knew them all of the time. We haven't yet caught up with Him.

If we continue to expand our knowledge as the exponential rate, doubling every five years, throughout eternity, you still would not catch up with God. But the beautiful thing is that God knows me! And God loves me!

Now he brings up the issue, ⁴*Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing* (We have knowledge. We realize that an idol is nothing.)*in the world, and that there is no other God but one.* We know this. We know that these various pagan deities that men are worshipping, these great temples, that have been built to the various gods, we know that they are nothing. Now Paul's going around and preaching the one God, created problems in this western society of those days, which was very polytheistic.

You remember when Paul (Acts 19:23-41) was in Ephesus, the silver smith, Demetrius, got stirred up. He stirred up the other fellows in his trade because business was down. They recognized that it was Paul's fault. He is saying that these little idols that we're making of Diana aren't real gods. People aren't buying the little idols anymore. Fellows, we are going to out of business if we don't do something about this guy, Paul. And they were concerned because Paul was teaching there was only one true God. These images and these idols were really nothing. They were representing deities that did not exist. So Paul said, we know this. We know that idols are nothing. There is only one God.

⁵*For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),* ⁶*yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.* We know this. We have this knowledge. There are many that are called gods that are not gods. There is only one true God, the Father, and we exist by Him or for Him. And we know there is only one Lord Jesus Christ and by whom are all things. And Paul asserts that in Colossians (1:15-19), that He is the creator of all things, so by Him all things exist and are held together. We are by Him.

⁷*However, there is not in everyone that knowledge;* Not everyone understand this. Many who converted to Jesus Christ still believed that were some mystic powers in these idols, that these gods somehow existed as sub-gods. They really felt there was something sinister behind them. Paul does affirm that later on. He said they that worship idols, are worshipping demons. So much of the worship was the worship of demons.

There was demonology and the worship of demons. Paul recognized that. But they are not gods! They are only evil spirits.

But everybody doesn't have this knowledge; *for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.* If they eat meat that has been offered to an idol, they feel guilty. They feel, wow, I'm sinning! And their conscience is defiled because they really do believe there is something to the idol that is being worshipped.

But Paul said, ⁸*But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.* In other words, it has nothing to do in reality with my actual relationship with God, whether I eat or I don't eat. If I don't eat that meat, I'm not any better off. I'm not any more spiritual. Spirituality is not a matter of what I am eating. Eating almonds is not more spiritual than eating peanuts. And thus he recognized that I am not spiritual or made spiritual, it doesn't commend me to God. God doesn't say, oh, look, nice righteous little boy, he eats almonds instead of peanuts. And these things have nothing to do with my relationship with God unless I believe that they do. And if I believe that they do, then they can hinder my relationship with God.

I had a fellow one day, who said to me, Chuck, I would love to be a Christian. I would love to come to your church. I love church. I would to serve the Lord. I would like to be a part of your fellowship. But there is so much pressure at work. I'm under such constant strain that when I get home in the evening, I'm just sort of wrung out, emotionally. He said, I just have to sit down and drink a beer. That's the way I relax. And I just need it. I can't do without it. I need that beer in order to just sort of wind down when I get home in the evening.

I thought, well I'll shock this guy. I said whoever said you couldn't ever have a beer when you get home from work? I drink all the beer I want. His mouth dropped open. He didn't know how to respond. But you see, that was an excuse that he was using. I suddenly wiped out his excuse. He didn't become a part of the fellowship. The reasons were deeper than the just fact that he liked the beer when he got home at night. But in reality, there are those Christians who do believe that they can drink beer. And there are those if they drank a beer, would have a problem with their conscience. Now the issues are the same. The one doesn't commend me to God. It doesn't make me any more righteous or any less righteous. God accounts me righteous because of my faith in Jesus Christ, not because of what I eat or don't eat, drink or don't drink. It is my faith and trust in Jesus Christ that God accounts for righteousness.

So Paul said, meat doesn't commend me to God because if we eat we're are not any better or if we eat not, or we the worse, but this is the issue, (Oh, let me clarify the former issue, I don't want to drink! I drink all I want, but I don't want to drink. I don't want you going around, saying our pastor drinks all he wants, you know. Chuck drinks like a fish, no, no. In a sense, I long ago took a Nazirite vow from the time I was a child, my mother had dedicated me to the Lord. And I say to the glory of God and to His credit, that I have never in my entire life have had a swallow of an alcoholic beverage. That doesn't make me any closer to God. That doesn't commend me to God. But that's just the way it is. And having not started, I don't expect to start any time in the near future.)

⁹*But beware (This is the issue.) lest somehow this liberty of yours (This freedom that you feel of eating the meat that has been sacrificed to idols.) become a stumbling block to those who are weak.* Those who are and would be troubled, if they ate meat that they knew was sacrificed to an idol. Whose conscience would be offended. Who would feel alienated from God. As I was saying earlier, if you feel that this will alienate you from God, it will! You see, it will hinder your faith in trusting and believing God. A lot of people are feeling alienated from God over things that they need not to be alienated from God, over, but because they have been taught this way, they believe it.

They believe that because they smoke cigarettes, they are lost. They are damned. Thus, they feel, you know, that I can't be a Christian because I can't kick the cigarettes. That's not so. You can smoke cigarettes and be a Christian. You can smoke a pipe and be a Christian. You can smoke cigars and be a Christian, a smelly one, but Christian, nonetheless. But if someone knows that you are a church member, and maybe, you are an usher or you have a position of prominence within the church, and they see you driving down the street with a big, old, stogie, it could offend them spiritually. It could stumble them. So Paul is saying, it

isn't the knowledge knowing that, hey, no this won't alienate me from God, I mean, I have the liberty. But be careful that your liberty doesn't become a stumbling-block to those that are weak.

10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, (He walks by and looks in. There you are, sitting in the idol's temple. You are eating the meat that obviously has been sacrificed to that idol.) will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? (He sees you do it. He has respected you. He has looked up to you as a spiritual leader, as one who really walks with God. He sees you, his conscience will be emboldened. Well, he does it, I can do it.

So often people are watching us that we are not even aware that they are watching us. Especially when you get into a position of prominence. You are being scrutinized. If you do something in the exercise of liberty, you say, well, I don't have any conscience against it. What's an idol? It's nothing. It's not a God. But they are emboldened to do that. Yet if they don't have that same understanding that you have, their conscience then can trouble them. They can feel guilty. They can feel condemned. They can feel alienated from God. Satan can use that against them, to actually drive a wedge between them and God because of their feeling of guilt and condemnation.

11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? Should you exercise your liberty in such a way as to stumble a brother for whom Christ died?

12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Thus you are actually sinning against Christ.

Now, you remember Jesus said (Matt.18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 12:2), that if a man would offend one of the little ones, who believe in me, it would be better for that man if they would tie a millstone around his head and toss him in the sea than to offend one of the little ones. Paul talks about Christian liberty here in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 6:12). He makes a very broad statement. We'll come across it again in a chapter or so. All things are lawful for me but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me but I shouldn't exercise that freedom if it would cause a weak brother to stumble. Why should I destroy a person for whom Christ died, just because I have liberty to do certain things? If I offend one of those little ones who believe in Him, it is a serious offense against the Lord.

13 Therefore, (Conclusion), if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Love edifies. Love builds up. Walking in love, I'm not concerned for my own liberties. I'm concerned for my weaker brother who may be offended because I do feel certain liberties.

Thus, walking in love, I seek to build up those in the body of Christ. It's a good rule to follow. Be careful that we don't do things that bring offense to the name of Jesus Christ.

That people are offended by it, the things that I do. I do make this a rule in my life. I'm very careful and very conscious about being in the ministry and the fact that people are scrutinizing us. That's why I always buy used cars. I don't buy a new car, lest someone be offended. Oh, the preacher gets a new car. I wish I could afford a new car. So I buy used cars. It doesn't bother me. They get me where I'm going. We just need to watch these things because people are watching you. And some of them don't have the depth of knowledge that you possess. They have weak consciences. They could be stumbled because of your liberties. Paul said, do you have liberty? Have it to yourself. Keep it to yourself.

So God help us not to be just thinking of ourselves but be thinking of others. How will this look to others? How will others view this? Will this stumble them? Will this cause them to be offended? Then I'll not eat meat as long as the world stand, if it will bring an offense to a weak brother. I want to walk in love. I want to build them up, not destroy them.

Father, help us. We thank You, Lord, for the wonderful liberty that we have in Christ. That He has set us free from the bondage of sin, from the power of sin. And Lord, he has given us such great freedom and such great liberty. Lord, help us to be careful in the exercise of our liberties, that we not do it in such a manner as it brings offense to a weak brother. But let us walk in love. In Jesus' name. Amen

