



# 1 CORINTHIANS

## 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13

### INTRODUCTION

In chapters 5-7, Paul addressed issues relating to sexuality. In addition to being sexually promiscuous, Corinth was also steeped in idol-worship, and Paul now turns in this section to address how to live faithfully in such a culture (8:1-11:1). Specifically, he addresses the matter of eating food that's been sacrificed to idols. In doing so, he addresses the more foundational issues of Christian freedom and the importance of love.

### MAIN POINT

Christians demonstrate Christ-like love by willingly sacrificing our rights for the good of others in the church.

### REFLECT

Religion and food were highly intertwined aspects of life in first-century Corinth. Meals often took place in dining halls attached to pagan temples and consisted of the remains of animals that had been sacrificed to the gods. These meals were a normal part of life in Corinth and were important for anyone wanting to be a functioning member of society.

Probably every non-Jew in the Corinthian church had taken part in these meals before their conversion. But now a debate had arisen as to what role (if any) such gatherings should play in the Christian life. On one side were those who, perhaps after years of worshipping pagan gods, couldn't partake of them without being tempted to revert back to their old ways.

On the other side were those who felt that these meals were no big deal, a conclusion supported by their knowledge that the gods being sacrificed to in these temples didn't even exist. But this camp's "knowledge" drove a wedge between them and those in the

first camp, and Paul is quick to warn them about any sort of knowledge that fosters pride rather than humility. The kind of knowledge we should strive for, says Paul, is to be known *by* God, a reality reserved for those who love God and, by extension, others (vv. 2-3). Any other knowledge is worthless and false (see 13:2).

Paul reaffirms Christianity's monotheism in stark contrast to the many deities of ancient Corinth (v. 4-6). But he acknowledges that not everyone in the Corinthian church shared this knowledge (v. 7). They had a harder time shaking belief in these false gods, and because of that, it would be sinful for them to violate their conscience by eating sacrificed foods. On top of that (and getting to Paul's main point), it would have been sinful for the stronger Christians to encourage them to violate their consciences through their example. Though Paul certainly wants these "weak" Christians to become "strong", he's against any idea of forcing this process. The strong need to cater to the weak, not vice versa. Otherwise, the growth of these weaker Christians is severely hindered (v. 9).

Verse 13 sums up Paul's point: as Christians, we should be so ruled by love for our brothers and sisters in Christ that we'll do anything for their good, even if it means abstaining from doing things that are fine to do in other contexts. While foods sacrificed to idols isn't an issue that Christians in the West typically deal with today, Paul's principle is as relevant as ever. We all come to Christ as broken sinners, and there are many in churches today who struggle to put old ways of thinking behind them. What might be okay for one believer to do might be a sin for another, and healthy churches are made up of those who acknowledge this and act accordingly.

- Why is it important to the Christian life to have correct doctrine? How does it help us to love others? What dangers are present as we grow in our knowledge of Christian doctrine?
- If Paul were writing this chapter today, what examples do you think he might have used instead of foods sacrificed to idols? What are some areas that Christians can be "weak" in today?
- What are some practical ways to live out verse 13 in your own life?

## MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 8:13 – *"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."*