

**Message of Paul:
Meat Sacrificed to Idols
1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

Intro: They had little red tags on these steaks and sold them for half price because the idols had failed to eat them and they had been sitting out in the sun all day. You had to go right home and slap them on the grill, but they were cheap and delish.

This was a big deal for the early Christians living in Greek culture. It is mentioned in the Book of Acts, discussed in Romans 14, and is the subject of considerable explanation for the Apostle Paul in the letter of First Corinthians. All in all, it may be the most perplexing ethical discussion in the early church.

Today's followers of Jesus experience many moral quandaries. The principles that are mentioned in Paul's discussion of questionable meat can be applied in making our choices today.

Every believer in Jesus should develop personal convictions about behavior based upon the teachings of God's Word. Let's take a look at this ancient moral struggle and how the Holy Spirit led believers to approach it. We are sure to find food for thought and food for our own soul.

I. Get the "Knowledge" Right.

A. We all possess knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:1a) A little knowledge is dangerous. Isn't this a curious way to start the discussion about food? Knowledge can make a person proud. It can make a person feel exalted and superior. And it can set up a person for terrible moral failure.

The Corinthians are having a lively discussion about this subject, and some of them are falling into pride and arrogance even as they seek to avoid another moral failure.

B. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1). Knowledge itself can lead to moral failure.

1. Add HUMILITY to your knowing. If we get puffed up, then we are filled with pride. And we are set up for a fall.

2. Add LOVE to your knowing. We must combine our knowing with our loving. Only then will our knowledge benefit us and those we care about.

C. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know (1 Corinthians 8:2). Facts are limited. We cannot know it all. We cannot know all the effects and side effects of every activity. We should find out all we can, and we should hold that knowledge with MODESTY. Be modest about your facts. That is, don't grandstand your knowledge. The more you know the more you know you don't know.

D. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know..." (1 Corinthians 8:4). Facts are not self-interpreting. Usually, someone has to take the data and tell us what it means.

***Francis Collins' "Language of God" is DNA, and he thinks it has no interference from humans as a language. The only problem is this—he must interpret it for me. And the language of DNA is not speaking with one voice to all scientists.

E. Facts are important. Paul is stating what we know. Part of any moral reasoning is to

properly understand the issue you are talking about. The explosion of knowledge in our day makes this more difficult than it used to be in some ways. There's a lot to learn out there.

But it also makes it more exciting. We have a lot of information about things we knew nothing about earlier.

***Preaching against smoking 50 years ago was mostly anecdotal. Smoking seemed to some of the faithful to be an addiction to a substance. And we should not be addicted to anything but Jesus. I remember Deacon Joe who was a chain smoker where I went to church in Center City. He had throat cancer. He would stand outside the church and suck on his lit cigarette by putting it at the tracheotomy hole in his throat.

With all respect for J.D. Grey, smoking has proven to be a tremendous health hazard. We know this now in a way we did not know it years ago. So the principle of caring for the body is applied.

II. Get the Theology Right: *We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one (1 Corinthians 8:4).*

A. Knowing who God is. *There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live (1 Corinthians 8:6).*

B. Know what gets us closer to God. *But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do (1 Corinthians 8:8).*

1. Being closer to God is our primary goal. We want to be like Christ, to know him more fully, and serve him more faithfully.
2. Being right about whether to eat this meat or not does not get you closer to God either way. The same may be said about any number of ethical issues that we hold near and dear. I am a teetotaler. But I am delusional if I think that my abstinence makes me closer to God than the brother who chooses moderation.

***I may be convicted to be vegetarian for whatever reasons. But if I practice that as a theological conviction, it does not advance my standing with God over others who remain carnivorous.

***I may be convicted that I should not participate in trick or treating or eating Halloween candy. That makes me no closer to God than those who eat such candy. In fact, my "knowledge" can puff me up and make me further from God, fill me with pride and a judgmental spirit.

***I am be convinced that Mardi Gras is of the devil. But if I abstain from going to parades and catching beads I am no closer to God than if I went. And if I hold my "knowledge" of the evil history of Mardi Gras is such a way that it puffs me up, makes me proud and contentious, then I am sinning even as I abstain.

C. The SIN is not in the eating or drinking but in the attitude and spirit that prevails in the heart. Jesus said it is not what goes into the man that defiles him, but what comes out (Mark 7:18-20).

This is a hard truth to absorb. We look at someone eating fried chicken and we think, “What an evil act.” Maybe we are concerned about the chicken that died. Maybe we are concerned about the saturated fats that clog up arteries. Whatever the reason, we think we are closer to God for not eating fried chicken. And to realize and receive the truth that it really doesn’t matter one way or another as far as our relationship with God—that is just difficult.

Especially is this true when the chicken you are talking about was sacrificed to an idol and came at a discount.

III. Get the Relationships Right: *Be careful that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak* (1 Corinthians 8:9)

A. Be careful for your brothers and sisters.

1. This concern for your brother is beautiful. We are all family in Christ. We should care for each other as brothers and sisters. This is how we are to relate to one another.
2. We have tremendous influence on each other.

***I was observing my granddaughters hanging out with their friends at a church fall festival. I observed how they wanted to be with their friends, do what their friends were doing. Hope took one round on a pony and was frightened and ready to get off, which she did, despite my encouragement to continue. But when Lindsey wanted to ride the pony, Hope was there again, and she made both rounds with Lindsey.

3. This is true whether we like it or not. Our brothers are watching our behavior. We do not have a choice about it.

B. We are not all in the same place spiritually. Some brothers are strong. Some are weak. In this case, the brothers who were against eating the meat are the “weak” ones. They haven’t yet reached the place where they can sort this out morally.

***Our culture recognizes developmental stages in the human experience with the ratings for movies. We do not want children watching violence that will frighten them, keep them up at night. They experience such things far too intensely and personally.

Those who are younger in the faith must be a priority for those of us who have been in Christ a long time.

C. Resolve to do what is best for your brother, not just what you feel the liberty to do.

1. This rift in the Corinthian church may be resolved simply by banning the eating of such meat. In this way they weak church members are protected and nurtured. There may come a time in the development of their faith that the meat can become part of their diet again. But that is down the road.
2. We should be careful with our food laws. We should always see them in the context of our culture. I grew up and remain a teetotaler. I don’t drink alcohol and never have. While I think it is a faithful position, I make a mistake if I see total abstinence as the only Christian position or think it makes us closer to God than others.

Conclusion: We are seeking to please the Father in heaven. We want to bring him glory with all that we do. Our affiliation with a family of faith is one of his primary concerns. He made us “members of the body.” We express that in a practical way when we submit to the discipline of being members of a local church.