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The Liberty and the Caution of Eating Meat Offered to Idols | 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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- Verse 1 –
  - The verse doesn't refer to **touching things offered to idols** (in a physical sense), but *concerning things offered to idols*.
  - **Things offered to idols** is the translation of a single word, εἰδωλόθυτος [eidolothytos]. The root includes *eidol* (idol) and *thyo* (killing).
    - This is only applicable to food that has been sacrificed in the practice of the worship of an idol.
    - Application to *Halal* meat or other food that is prepared according to pagan religious custom.
  - I would put a parenthetical statement between the **we know** of v. 1, picking up again with the **we know** of v. 4. Within the parenthetical statement is a side note concerning the danger of knowledge.
    - **Knowledge puffeth up**, and this is its danger. It would be a logical fallacy to claim that knowledge is undesirable.
    - **Charity edifieth**, that is, *love builds up*. This is also not an exclusive statement.
    - Taken together, it is a warning to avoid the arrogance of **knowledge** without **charity**.
    - Paul uses the word translated **puffed up** seven times, six to the Corinthians in this letter, and once to the Colossians. In all of his works, he consistently spoke of the need for humility of knowledge (Rom. 11:25, 12:16, 1 Cor. 13:4, for example).
- Verse 2 –
  - Knowledge brings humility.
    - As we say, "the more we know, the more we know we don't know."
    - Paul uses the word δοκέω [dokeo] for **think**. This is not the typical knowledge based word for *think*, but is the word from which we get the English word *docetic* or *docetism* (an early cultic belief that said that Jesus only *seemed* to have a human body and only *seemed* to die on the cross). The word is means *to have the appearance but not the reality*.
  - Students of the Word should humbly question the assumptions of their theological knowledge.
- Verse 3 - The pronoun **him** is a reference to God. It is not a *knowledge* that God is impressed with, but the fact that we **love God**.
- Verse 4 –
  - *The Message* says "Some people say...that idols have no actual existence." Even though it adds, "quite rightly" as a commentary on what "some people say," this is far from the clear declaration of the text, which says **we know that an idol is nothing...and that there is none other God but one** (KJV).
  - The ESV, CSB, and others use quotes to do effectively the same thing, "...we know that "an idol is nothing in the world," and that "there is no God but one" (CSB). While the latter phrase could match Deuteronomy 6:4, the supposition that the former is a quote is pure speculation, and unnecessary for a Biblical translation.
  - *Cosmology* is the philosophical study of existence. Paul says that **an idol is nothing in the world**, using the word κόσμος [kosmos]. He says, therefore, in no uncertain terms, that idols are mere wood and stone, that there is no reality whatsoever to the myth and legend that create their persona.
- Verses 5-6 –
  - Our *cosmology* is completely wrapped up in **one God** who is **the Father** and **all things** are of Him.
  - There is **one Lord** also, **by whom are all things**. This is Jesus Christ.
  - Note that **all things** are **of** the Father and **by** the Son. Literally, *out of* the Father and *through* the Son. Everything that exists came *out of* God the Father and came into existence *through* the Son (Compare Colossians 1:16-17).

- Verse 7 –
  - Paul moves from the discussion of *reality* to the discussion of *perception*. Perception is a problem of lack of knowledge, and it twists reality like a house of mirrors.
  - The **conscience** becomes an important matter in perception issues. The word is used four times in this discussion (twice in v. 7, v. 10, v. 12).
    - The word is συνείδησις [syneidesis], which is "*seeing together*."
    - It is likely a reference to the experiences a person has seen that affect their worldview.
    - Note that a person's experiences are anecdotal and should not be taken as the definition of reality (you cannot prove the existence of God based on your experience anymore than an idol worshiper can prove the reality of their god based on experience).
    - To build a strong (as opposed to **weak**) conscience is to develop the skill of basing decisions on reality rather than experience.
- Verse 8 –
  - The old usage of the word **commendeth** is *to place into someone's care*.
    - HCSB, NLT, says *make us acceptable*, which is too much interpretation. TEV is similar with *improve our relations*. NET, NCV, LEB use *bring us close*, which is closer to the meaning of the word.
  - **Meat** (anything that a person may eat, whether meat or vegetable), does not place us into God's care, nor remove us from it.
- Verse 9 –
  - Paul has introduced a great **liberty** (literally, *authority, or right* (as in Darby)) when he declared that the body of Christ is free from kosher regulations as well as issues dealing with meat sacrificed to idols.
  - How does this liberty harmonize with Acts 15:20, where James says **abstain from pollutions of idols**? First, James' words are not a command, but a request. Second, James' words are in relation to giving offense, which exactly matches Paul's instruction.
- Verse 10 –
  - Once again, the one **that hath knowledge** is the stronger brother, but strength has dangers (see vv. 1-3).
  - By the display of liberty the stronger will cause the **conscience of him which is weak to be emboldened**, and the weak brother will eat against his/her conscience.
- Verse 11 –
  - How can Paul, who had immediately preceding said **an idol is nothing** (v. 4) and that we are not any better nor worse **if we eat** or **if we eat not** (v. 8) now say that a **weak brother** would **perish** by eating? The word **perish** is the same as in John 3:16.
  - Paul clearly cannot be talking about someone losing their salvation. But, realizing that Paul speaks to a believing Jewish congregation, the **brother** can be seen as a *brother in the Jewish family* rather than a brother in Christ. This would align with Paul's phrase, **the brethren** in v. 12, which aligns with Matthew 25:40. Such a view also aligns with James' teaching in Acts 15:20.
  - An abundance of idiocy comes from commentaries that misunderstand this verse.
    - Barnes - Paul says that "if *one* thing was done, *another might* follow" but it is only a scenario, not something that actually happened, because "no one who has been truly converted will apostatize."
    - Jamieson, Fausset & Brown - "A single act seemingly unimportant may produce everlasting consequences. The weak brother loses his faith, and if he do not recover it, his salvation."
- Verse 12 - As in v. 11, **the brethren** are not *brothers in Christ* but unsaved Jews. Since Paul had a **great heaviness and continual sorrow** over the Jewish people, whom he called **my brethren** (Rom. 9:2-3), he wanted the Corinthian Jewish believers to know that anything which hindered their acceptance of faith was a **sin against Christ**.
- Verse 13 - Paul makes a final commitment to sacrifice his own liberties (compare 9:1) for the sake of his Jewish brethren.