

1 Corinthians Study 11

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

KEY VERSE—

“Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” (8:1)

SUMMARY—

According to Erdman the question of eating meats offered to idols “was very serious for the Christians at Corinth. Idolatrous practices were related to almost every family and social and political custom of the times. Meats which had been sacrificed in the temple were used at all social festivities; they were exposed for sale in the regular markets and were placed upon the table before invited guests and might appear in one’s own home. It was, therefore a very difficult and delicate problem...” Paul begins commending knowledge, but knowledge alone can become imbalanced and detrimental (8:1-3; cf. 13:2). In regard to idols, they are really nothing—not just lower gods but actually they are representative of beings which do not even exist (8:4-6). Yet, the misuse of that knowledge and flaunting of one’s liberty may prove destructive to the weak brother who accounts the eating of those meats as an acknowledgment of the idol’s existence (8:7-13).

QUESTIONS—

1) Many of these brethren knew the truth about idols, but what was that knowledge causing them to do (8:1)? Enlightenment and knowledge of the truth is not everything—who is Paul criticizing here (8:1-2)?

2) What good is knowledge without love (8:1-3; cf. 13:2)? Knowledge “puffs up” whereas love “builds up”—what is the difference (8:1)? How is knowledge without love actually a type of ignorance (8:1-3)? Knowledge is good, but what is considered an unhealthy attitude toward knowledge (8:2a)?

3) What had the Corinthians allowed their knowledge to do to them (8:1; cf. 4:6,18-19; 5:2; 13:4)? What does wisdom recognize about itself (8:2)? What does the man who is puffed up not know (8:3)?

4) We are inclined to say that knowledge of science, philosophy, and psychiatry have their problems—but what kind of knowledge does Paul say has its problems too?

5) What matters more than knowledge (8:3)? Why is this more important?

6) Are the other gods of the pagans the enemies of God? Are they lesser deities? Or do they even exist (8:4)? Is Paul affirming that there are many gods in heaven and earth, or that men believe in many (8:5; cf. Romans 1:18-25; Acts 17:16-31)?

7) Although the gods represented by these idols were non-existent (8:4), the idols did represent something very real—what was it (10:19-21)?

8) What were Paul and the knowledgeable Christians sure of (8:5-6)?

9) What does he mean when he says of God “of whom are all things” (8:6; cf. Genesis 1:1)? What does he mean when he says of God “and we for Him” (8:6; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13; Isaiah 43:7)?

10) What does he mean when he says of Jesus “through whom are all things” (8:6; cf. John 1:1-3,14; Hebrews 1:2)? What does he mean when he says of Jesus “through whom we live” (8:6; cf. Colossians 1:16-17)?

11) Where did the great problem lie in this discussion of eating meat offered to idols (8:7)? Describe the perspective of this weak brother (8:7).

12) In our concern for our “rights” and liberties, what may we forget (8:9)? What is the danger of flaunting our liberties (8:9-11)?

13) How would the weak brother be sinning when he ate meat that was not wrong to eat (8:10-11)? How can a man be considered guilty of sin just because he cannot rid himself of an erroneous view he holds? If the sin is not in the act itself, then where is the sin?

14) For a Christian to feast in such a place as an idol’s temple may have been a liberty, but it was a reckless abuse of liberty (8:10-11). Can you think of modern day parallels?

15) What are the results of causing another to stumble—five are mentioned (8:11-12)?

16) Is it possible for one who belongs to Christ to fall away from Him and perish (8:11)?

17) Is it possible to spiritually destroy someone with the truth (8:11-12)? How?

18) What is the conclusion of this discussion of things offered to idols (8:1,13)?

19) How can Paul at the same time defend Christian freedom and impose severe restrictions (8:1-13; cf. Matthew 5:29-30; 18:6-9)?

20) How can instructions about such things help us understand answers to today's pressing problems of conscience?