

Day 90, 1 Corinthians 8

by David Servant

David Servant explores the balance between knowledge and love in the context of eating meat sacrificed to idols, emphasizing the importance of conscience and responsibility towards fellow believers.

Scripture: Romans 14:23, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Corinthians 8:1, 1 Corinthians 8:10, 1 Corinthians 8:12

Topics: "Christian Conscience", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

David Servant delves into Paul's teachings to the Corinthians regarding the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul emphasizes the importance of love, humility, and consideration for fellow believers in matters of knowledge and conscience. He warns against causing others to stumble by acting against their conscience, even if the action itself may not be sinful. Paul stresses the need for believers to maintain clear consciences and to help others do the same, avoiding actions that may lead to sin or confusion.

Transcript

Paul turns his attention to a second question from the Corinthians---about the lawfulness of eating meat that had previously been sacrificed to idols. Before he tackles that issue, however, he first warns of a venom that often poisons those who possess knowledge, namely, pride. "Knowledge puffs up," he says (8:1). The antidote for knowledge-born pride is not ignorance, but love, consisting of humility, forbearance and concern for those who lack the same knowledge. Those who are growing in the true knowledge of the Lord are also growing in their realization of how little they know, and thus humility should proportionately increase with knowledge. Daily Bible readers, take note!

Paul plants himself squarely on the side of those believers in Corinth who believed that it was not sinful to eat meat that had been previously sacrificed to idols. Certainly God is offended by people's devotion to idols, a devotion that rightfully belongs to Him. The one who eats meat that was sacrificed to an idol by someone else, however, does not participate in his sin. Yet it is quite easy to see how some, who love God with all their hearts, might think otherwise. This is just what had happened at Corinth.

Paul was concerned that some, who like himself, knew that eating meat sacrificed to idols was not wrong, might cause those who believed otherwise to stumble into doing what they considered sinful. He offered an example:

For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? (8:10)

That is, if a believer (who thinks that eating meat sacrificed to idols is wrong) might see a fellow believer (who knows otherwise) eating at a restaurant connected to an idol's temple, he might be tempted to join his brother, and in so doing, violate his conscience. Although he isn't actually sinning by his act of eating meat sacrificed to idols, because he thinks he is sinning, he is sinning, because he is making a decision in his heart to do what he thinks is sin. So his heart rightfully condemns him as he eats.

Paul addressed this same issue in his letter to the Romans, writing:

But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).

Because of this, not only is the believer with the weak conscience guilty of sin for doing what he thinks is sin, the one who caused him to stumble into violating his conscience is also guilty of sin against his brother and Christ (8:12). For this reason, we should be sensitive towards fellow believers with "weak consciences," being careful to do nothing to lead them into doing what they might think is sin. There is nothing wrong, however, with trying to help a believer with a weak conscience overcome his doubts by enlightening him with truth, as proven by Paul's declarations in this very chapter of the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Sadly, some have twisted what Paul wrote about "Christian liberty," promoting liberty from God's commandments. But standards have been set in God's Word. Although Paul did not condemn Christians eating meats that were sacrificed to idols, he condemned idolatry as an eternally damning sin, according to what he wrote two chapters earlier (6:9-10). Similarly, when professing believers disagree over the lawfulness of viewing sexually-explicit movies, for example, there is no application found in what we read today. Scripture condemns all forms of immorality, including immorality of the mind.

From this chapter we again see how important it was to the early church to obey the Lord and keep a clear conscience, as well as help others in Christ's body to keep a clear conscience. If we are unsure about the lawfulness of something, we ought to avoid it until we are sure. According to what we read today, one whose weak conscience is "wounded" might end up "ruined" (8:11-12), or alternately interpreted, "destroyed," another difficult scripture to reconcile with the idea of unconditional eternal security.

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