

(1 Corinthians) ch.7:25-8:13

by Zac Poonen

Paul discusses the importance of recognizing God's mercy and priorities in our lives, and how it affects our decisions on marriage, the single life, and our relationship with the world.

Duration: 43:46

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:32

Topics: "Eternal Focus", "Spiritual Priorities"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that the time we live in is short and that the world is not our permanent home. He urges believers to prioritize serving the Lord over their attachments to worldly things, including marriage. The preacher also discusses the importance of considering the feelings of others in matters such as food and possessions, living according to love rather than just knowledge. Ultimately, he reminds listeners that our acceptance by God is not based on external factors like food or earthly joys, but on our devotion to Him and our focus on eternity.

Transcript

Let's turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 25, continuing our study on marriage and the marriage relationship and the single life and married life. Paul continues here in verse 25 to say, concerning virgins, that is, concerning your virgin daughters or young unmarried women, I have no command from the Lord. Paul is very honest.

Where he has clear directions from the Lord, he says so, and that's what gives us great confidence about the things he writes. And where he does not have a clear command from the Lord, he's honest enough to admit it. It's amazing.

But he says, I give an opinion. I give my judgment as a man whom the Master, in his mercy, has made worthy to be trusted, one who is deserving of your confidence. Or, as J.B. Phillips says, I give you my considered opinion as one who is, I think, to be trusted, after all his experience of God's mercy.

He doesn't say that he deserves the position of trust and confidence that he holds as an apostle. No, he says it is 100% the result of God's mercy. Through God's mercy, he is worthy to be trusted.

And as such a person, he gives an opinion. And there we see the amazing humility of this mighty apostle who could have laid down a law. And that teaches us that those who are in positions of responsibility need

to take that same place of humility, recognizing that all that they are is only by the mercy of the Lord.

Has God placed you in a place of responsibility, brother, or authority over others? Remember, it is only by the mercy of the Lord, no other factor, the mercy of the Lord alone, that keeps you there. And blessed are those who remain in that place with their face in the dust, because then they can continue in God's grace. And he says, I give my opinion.

He's not giving a command where God hasn't given one. There are many areas in Scripture which are, we can say, silent matters. Many areas in which Scripture is silent.

In such matters, it's right for us to speak, provided we make clear that we're only giving an opinion and not a command. When you lay down a command where the Lord has not laid down a command, you become a pharisee yourself, you bind burdens on other people which they are unable to lift, and you make pharisees of others. An example of this we can find in Genesis chapter 3. God had told Adam that he was not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

But when Satan asked Eve what God had commanded, she said, God has told us not to eat it and not even to touch it. She added something. And when we add something which God has not written in his word, we are in danger of becoming pharisees.

This is how the pharisees became pharisees in Jesus' day, by adding commands that Moses had not given. And Paul was very careful not to make that mistake. And we must be very careful when listening to preachers that we're not listening to things which God has not commanded, but the preacher's own ideas are treated as commands.

And there are many, many examples of this in Christendom, unfortunately, of people propagating their own views as commands. The only thing that we have a right to pass on as a command is what the Lord Himself has clearly commanded in the New Testament. All other matters we must give freedom to other people to hold their views, but we are entitled to give our opinion if we recognize the mercy of the Lord in our life and have earned the confidence of others because of that mercy of God that's been upon our life.

And then he gives his opinion concerning unmarried people. He says, I think then, and I think this relates to unmarried people in general, not just to women, but men as well, in view of the present or impending distress, it is good for a man to remain as he is. In other words, it's good to remain single because of the present time of suffering.

In other words, Paul was writing around 52 or 55 A.D., and that was a time of persecution. The circumstances in that part of the world were such there was a lot of anti-Christian persecution. And he says, in view of this present distress, in view of the time of suffering that has now come upon us or that is now imminent because of this situation, therefore, I would suggest that you remain single.

He's speaking about being single because of circumstances, you know, because it's easy for persecutors to get at a man through his family, and for that reason, he says, avoid it. And we must see it in its context because it's specifically mentioned in verse 26, in view of this present distress or the impending imminent time of suffering that Christians are likely to face. And in that context, he says, in verse 27, are you married? Stop trying to get a divorce.

Don't seek to be released. Don't wish that you were single. There are a lot of married people who wish that they were single.

That's plain disobedience to the command of God in verse 27. Do not seek to be released. Are you bound to a wife? Don't daydream and wish you were single.

Are you released from a wife? In other words, are you single or a widow? Well, don't seek a wife in this present circumstance. But this I say, if you do get married, verse 28, it's not a sin. I'm not saying that you're sinning if you get married, but in view of the present circumstances, it's better to avoid it.

And if a virgin marries, if a girl marries, she doesn't sin, far from it. But he says, and here's the reason, such people are going to have great difficulty in this present circumstance, that such will have trouble in this life, and I'm trying to spare you. You'll have trouble in relation to worldly matters, or as J.B. Phillips says, those who take this step of marriage are bound to find the marriage state an extra burden in these critical days.

And I should like you to be as unencumbered as possible. In other words, what I said earlier, that is, a persecutor can get at a man through his family, and he won't be able to get at you if you don't have a family. And in view of this particular time, these critical days, you are bound to find trouble in this life, and therefore to avoid that I would suggest that in this present time, stay single.

But Paul is very clear in 1 Timothy chapter 4, and verse 1 to 3, he says, those who forbid marriage as a rule are propagating a doctrine of a demon. And later on also in Hebrews 13, verse 4, marriage must be held in honor among all people. It is not more spiritual to remain single.

That is not what he is speaking, and yet that is how many groups and Christians have interpreted it contrary to the teaching of God's word. The reason is very clear, in view of this present time. And he continues on that same theme, verse 29, this I say, brethren, the time is shortened.

The time we live in is not going to last long. At times of persecution, there is a possibility of death also for Christians. And therefore, he says, there is very little time that all of us have to serve the Lord in this critical juncture that we are living in.

Therefore, since the time is short, those who have wives should be as though they had none. That means it is necessary not to get so attached to marriage and to the marriage relationship that you live as though marriage is the only thing that there is in this life. No.

The meaning of this verse, in verse 29, is that you must remember that the Lord's work also needs to have some priority in your time schedule. You must not think only in terms of pleasing your wife. You have got to be devoted to the Lord as well, and that is a word that applies to every one of us as well.

Don't think that marriage is everything. It's something God has provided, as he said earlier on in the first few verses of chapter 7, but the Lord's work and His church must also have a priority in your interests. And he says further on, in the same context, those who weep.

He doesn't say that you shouldn't weep, but don't get so taken up with weeping that you have time for nothing else. You have a particular sorrow or a loss, okay, you weep a little, and you are disturbed a bit, but not that you are so taken up with it that you are drowned in sorrow. There are people who, say, lose a loved one, and they are drowned in sorrow for months on end.

That is not the will of God. In the same way, rejoicing. There are little earthly joys that come our way, but we mustn't be so taken up with those earthly joys as though we've got everything.

No, eternity is what we live for. And likewise, when you buy something, don't let your attitude towards the thing you buy be as though you possessed it forever. It's only for a short time that you're going to have it.

We're going to leave our possessions and go. This is not our final home. And those who use this world, verse 31, as not abusing it, in other words, not getting absorbed in the world and worldly affairs in the pursuit of your profession and advancement in the world.

No, our contact with the world must be as light as possible. This is J.B. Phillips' paraphrase. Our contact with the world must be as light as possible because this present scheme of things is rapidly passing away.

This world is passing away. Marriage is going to be finished with. All the things that make us weep and rejoice and that we can buy and use in this world are all going to pass away.

In other words, the gist of what he says here in verse 29 to 31 is, since this world is not our home, we're only passing through, let's hold lightly that our contact with all these things necessary be as light as possible. We turn today to 1 Corinthians and chapter 7 and verse 32. We were considering here in our last study Paul's instructions to unmarried people and to married people and he says that we should not get taken up with this world as though this world is everything because this world is not everything and our contact with this world must be as light as possible.

Of course, the purpose is that we might be devoted to the Lord and that's what he goes on to explain in the following verses. But this passage is very important for us to bear in mind whether we think of marriage or not. Verse 29 to 31, that in the marriage relationship and in weeping and things that bring sorrow to us on the earth, in rejoicing and things that bring joy to us on the earth, and also in buying, which is also a necessity on this earth, and using the things of the world, we always keep in mind that none of these things, including marriage, are permanent.

There is no marriage in heaven. It's only as long as we are on this earth. The main thing that we should be taken up therefore with is not buying or selling or weeping or rejoicing or even the marriage relationship, but rather an undistracted devotion to the Lord.

And so he says, I want you to be free from all anxieties. I want you to be free from all worry. If you are taken up with this world and buying and selling and loss and gain and profit and the use of worldly things and the abundance of things that we can buy with the money we earn and weeping and rejoicing, if these things were taken up with, then we'll have many anxieties.

But if you realize these come our way, they fall on us, but they must roll off us like water off a duck's back, then we can be free from worry, whether married or unmarried. And he goes on to say, one who is unmarried is, generally speaking, more able to concentrate on the Lord's affairs. He's free in the sense that he does not have other distractions that a family man has, distractions of married life, and therefore he's able to concentrate on the Lord and his service, as to how he can please the Lord, how he can do all that God wants in all the time that he has.

But, he says, in contrast, one who is married, no doubt he can serve the Lord too, but he has also to be concerned with his responsibilities down here on earth, and therefore he has to be occupied with certain earthly things. And he has to please his wife, his movements are not entirely unrestricted, he has to consider his wife and his children too, many restrictions like that, and therefore he cannot move freely. For example, Paul himself, he could move freely anywhere he wanted, because he didn't have a family.

And this is the point, that those who are called to an apostolic ministry like Paul, need perhaps to be single. And also, because movement was so difficult in those days, these days of quick travel across the earth, it is not such a problem as it was in those days, where if a man traveled even a few hundred miles away, he couldn't come back for months. And so we see here, that one who wants to be devoted to the Lord in that type of ministry, needs to consider whether God may not be giving him the gift of a single life.

This is the point of this whole passage. Otherwise, we will be taken up with family responsibilities as well. And therefore his interests are divided, in the sense he's torn in two directions.

Further he says, likewise, a woman who is single, unmarried, can be occupied with the things of the Lord, and be occupied with preserving herself in a devotion to the Lord, which is not divided with a devotion to her husband, that she may be dedicated in body and in spirit to the Lord. But the one who is married has got many earthly affairs to be taken up with. But we must keep in mind, in all these things, what he said earlier, in verse 7, that yet God calls some to a married life and some to a single life.

So he's not speaking about which is a holier state, the single state or the married state. No. Both are equally holy.

You can be holy as a married person, as we considered Enoch in Genesis 5.22, who walked with God for three hundred years and had sons and daughters. Equally, we can be holy in the single state like Paul was. But it's a question of being devoted entirely to the Lord's affairs.

And that's what he clarifies in verse 35. He says, I'm saying this for your own benefit, to help you. I'm not trying to put a halter round your necks like a man would put round a dog or a rein in a horse's mouth to hold you back.

He says, I'm not doing that. But I'm only thinking of what is suitable in order to secure your undistracted devotion to the Lord, the last part of verse 35. So that is the reason with which he has written all that he's written down from verse 25 onwards.

He says, I'm not giving a command of the Lord. Notice verse 25 to 35. He says, I'm not giving a command of the Lord.

It's very wrong for any of us to take the things listed in verse 25 to 35 as direct commands. But he says, I'm giving an opinion, and yet a worthwhile opinion, but a matter on which the Lord has given us freedom, according to our particular calling. The principle is true.

The basic principle that because this world is passing away, verse 31, we should sit lightly on the necessary things of earth. And the point is, the sum and substance and the gist of it is this, that if you are called to the type of ministry that Paul has, and if you can have this ability to stay single, then keep yourself single so that you can serve the Lord without any distractions, so that you'll be able to give all your attention to the things of the Lord, as far as possible free from worldly distractions. But he goes on to say, if anyone thinks that he's not acting properly towards his virgin daughter, verse 36, he feels that she's growing up and she's passing the flower of youth and she's going beyond the age of marriage, and he feels that he should get her married.

Well, there's nothing wrong in that. He says that's perfectly all right. He doesn't sin.

If he gets her married, let her get married. It's perfectly all right. He has suggested to her to serve the Lord undistractedly, but she probably does not have that calling.

Then she should be married. Let him do what he wills. Let him get her married, and there is no sin in that at all.

On the other hand, a father who is strong in mind and purpose and has also decided in his heart to keep his own virgin daughter, he does well. Of course, the daughter's attitude also must be considered in this matter, whether she is devoted to the Lord and has the gift of a single life. That's good if she can serve the Lord in a single way, but otherwise it's perfectly all right for her to be married.

So he says in verse 38, the one who gives his virgin daughter in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage, and of course that is where she also has that feeling, he says, I think she's doing better. This is not what the Lord is saying. He has no command from the Lord.

Verse 25 applies here also. But my opinion. But he goes on to say, but one thing is clear.

Whatever we may say about being single or being married, one thing is clear. Verse 39, that as long as a husband lives, a wife is bound to her husband by the law of wedlock, and the husband is bound to the wife. But only if the husband dies, then only is she free to be married to whom she wishes.

Now that's a very clear statement that cannot be cancelled out by anything else stated in 1 Corinthians 7. We need to bear in mind that in God's eyes a marriage, whether conducted in heathen circumstances or in Christian circumstances, makes no difference. Where a man and woman are joined together, they are husband and wife as long as both partners are alive. That can never be broken.

Even if they separate due to whatever circumstances, no one is free to be married again until the other partner is dead. And even when the other partner dies, if you are a believer, you are free but only to be married to someone else who is a Christian. Only someone else who is in the Lord.

That is something that comes later on in 2 Corinthians 6.14.2. You are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Your freedom is only to marry in the Lord, but that also only after your marriage partner dies. And then he goes on to say in verse 40, again my opinion.

I'm not giving a command here, but in my opinion, if the married partner dies, I think she'll be happier if she remains as a widow, unmarried. And then he makes this beautiful statement. He says, I think that I also have the Spirit of God, just like the rest of you.

Don't think that you only have the Holy Spirit. And he says, I think I'm expressing not just my opinion, but the will of the Spirit in this matter. There we see something of Paul's humility.

That though he has obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful and to earn the confidence of many people in many parts of the world, yet he gives his humble opinion, no doubt guided by the Holy Spirit, but he's very careful not to put a burden upon people like the Pharisees, which they are not able to lift. So he says, I give my opinion, but feel free to do exactly as you feel right in this matter, according to the general principles that the Lord has laid down. Let's turn today in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 8. Paul is writing to the Corinthian Christians concerning various matters on which they had written, asking for clarification.

And in chapter 7, he had written about the man-woman relationship in marriage and about the single life. In chapter 8, he moves on to another topic, and that is concerning things sacrificed to idols. In Corinth, like in many other cities and towns of those days, there were idolatrous temples, and food was offered, the meat sold in the market was offered to these idols in the temples before being sold in the market.

And very often, if you visited a heathen family, the food that is set before you would be food that's offered to idols. This is a very common practice as it is even today in many places. And he says, concerning things sacrificed to idols.

This is the subject he's going to deal with in this chapter, but before entering into an answer to the specific question that the Corinthians had asked, he gives certain general principles which apply not only to this topic, but also to many other topics. He says, we know that we all have knowledge. Of course, he's being a bit sarcastic there.

He says, we presuppose that we have all knowledge. As you say, we all have knowledge. But he says the important thing is not knowledge, but love.

It is love that must guide our actions and not merely knowledge. If you have knowledge without love, it says it will just puff you up. Knowledge breeds conceit.

Or, as J.B. Phillips paraphrases the last part of verse one very beautifully, we should remember that while knowledge may make a man look big, it is only love that can make him grow to his full stature. Perhaps you have seen this unfortunate condition in certain babies who are born with what is medically known as a condition called hydrocephalus, where the head of the baby is swollen up with water inside, and the head is very huge. Now, that's a sick condition.

Now, just because the head of that baby is very big doesn't mean it's very brainy and clever. Far from it. And that's exactly the point.

That mere Bible knowledge without love puffs up your head like that baby's head, full of water, but no brains. In the spiritual life, in the Christian life, Paul says, to be clever and wise spiritually is to be full of love. It's love by which our intelligence, our IQ is tested in the Christian life, not by Bible knowledge.

The fact that you get a hundred percent in every Bible quiz does not prove that you're a spiritual person. You may be just having a swollen head like that baby with hydrocephalus. No, knowledge puffs up.

It's like an inflated balloon with nothing inside. It is love which fills us up and helps us to grow to our full stature. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

And this is very important for us to bear in mind, particularly in our day where there's such a lot of emphasis on Bible knowledge. In the 20th century, we have more access to knowledge of the Scriptures than in any other century in the history of the human race. We have so many hopes.

We have so many translations of the Bible in the English language. We have concordances and commentaries, Bible schools, umpteen Bible schools and colleges, and yet we must never forget knowledge puffs up. Those who are keen on the study of the Word of God, that's a very good desire, but beware that you don't just accumulate knowledge.

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. And every student of the Word of God must bear in mind this one sentence. Knowledge puffs up.

And it's not talking about worldly knowledge there. Bible knowledge can puff a person up. In other words, make him proud.

And his pride makes God his enemy because God gives his grace only to the humble. The Bible says in 1 Peter 5.5 that God resists the proud. And if Bible knowledge has puffed up a man and he's become proud, God will become his enemy in spite of all his Bible knowledge.

But on the other hand, if he realizes that the first two commandments are related to love, all the commandments hang on love to God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind, and loving one's neighbor as oneself. If one realizes that love is the fulfillment of the law, love is the goal of all our preaching, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 1.5, then we can be built up. And he goes on to say, if anyone thinks, supposes that he knows anything, if anyone thinks that he has all the answers, and it's very possible for someone who has studied the scriptures for some length of time, and you're a preacher perhaps, or a pastor, or an elder in some assembly, and it's very easy to think that you have all the answers.

That really shows you don't know very much about God at all. The more a man knows God, the more he realizes there are a lot of things in the Christian life which are mysterious. A lot of things about God which are a mystery, which we cannot explain or interpret perfectly.

For example, the Trinity. That is not something that we can explain. Our human minds cannot fathom the mystery of the Trinity.

If anyone thinks that he has all the answers, well, he's still really got a lot to learn. He hasn't known yet, as he ought to know. He hasn't reached that knowledge which he should have reached.

We cannot understand everything fully. When we stand before the Lord, then we shall have fuller knowledge. Meanwhile, what must we do? Verse 3. If we love God, and then of course we love our neighbor as well, we are known by God.

That's a very beautiful verse that explains to us how God can say to us that He knows us. Who are the people on the face of the earth concerning whom God can say, I know so and so? Here is the answer. If you love God, if a man loves God, God knows him.

The word know is a word used in the Bible concerning the marriage relationship. A man knew his wife is the word used in the Bible to describe the physical relationship in marriage. And here it says God knows a man when that man loves God.

Not when he has all the answers from the Bible to Bible quizzes, but when he loves God. And when we compare this with that word that Jesus spoke in Matthew chapter 7 concerning many who would come to Him in the last day and say to Him, Matthew 7 verse 22, they will say to Him in that day, Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name? In your name we cast out demons, and in your name we did many miracles. The word that the Lord is going to say to them is this, I never knew you.

It's the same word, know. In other words, I never had a marriage relationship with you in your spirit. I never knew you.

And what does that mean? Interpreting it with 1 Corinthians 8, 1 Corinthians 8 verse 3, it means that you did not love me with all your heart. You did so many wonderful things, but you did not love me. Dear friends, it's very important for us to bear in mind that ultimately when we stand before the Lord, we don't get any marks for our Bible knowledge.

We get marks for love. How much we loved God above this world and above money, and how much we loved our fellow believers as Jesus has loved us, laying down our life for them, and how much we loved our neighbors as ourselves. At the judgment seat of Christ, marks are given only for love, not for knowledge.

And when we look at the two trees that God placed in the Garden of Eden, we see that one was a tree of knowledge, of good and evil. That was the forbidden tree. And the other was the tree of life, which was not forbidden.

In fact, Adam and Eve could have gone and eaten of that tree of life. And we can say that 1 Corinthians 8 verse 1 is really dealing with those two trees. The tree of life is the tree of the divine nature, which is love.

So we can say that in the Garden of Eden, there were two trees among others. One was a tree of knowledge, and the other was the tree of love. And it's very significant that Satan tempted man and woman to avoid the tree of love and reach for knowledge.

It's exactly the same today. That Satan, when he can't stop us from sinning, when he can't stop us from reading the scriptures, when he can't stop us from the study of the scriptures, he gets us to concentrate on an academic study of the scriptures instead of obedience to the commandments. If you love me, Jesus said, you'll keep my commandments.

That's the proof of our love. And so let's be aware of Satan's schemes in this area. Like he tempted Adam and Eve to reach for knowledge instead of life, he tempts men and women, believers today, to reach for knowledge of God's word rather than obedience to God's word.

Obedience is more important than knowledge. Love for God is manifested in obedience. So let's steer clear of this danger and seek and pursue after love.

Let's turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 4. Last week we were considering that before Paul laid down teaching concerning the eating of things sacrificed and offered to idols, he lays down a general principle that applies to all our decisions and in this decision in particular. And that is, knowledge alone should not guide us in our decision but love. It's no use arguing and proving our point with all the Bible knowledge we have if our actions still violate the law of love.

We may be able to prove in a court of law that what we have done in a particular situation does not violate any particular command or precept of scripture, yet if we have by that action hurt and wounded another person and violated the law of love, it's wrong. It's wrong nevertheless, even if we can prove in a court of law that we have not violated any principle of scripture. So we must bear that in mind.

We were saying in a number of our earlier studies in 1 Corinthians that 1 Corinthians could be looked upon as a letter that shows us the attitudes of the carnal Christian, the attitude of a spiritual baby. And in verses 1 to 3 where Paul draws this contrast between knowledge and love, we can see that the carnal Christian is the one who's taken up with knowledge, and the spiritual Christian is the one who's taken up with love. Knowledge is more important than love to the carnal Christian, but to the spiritual Christian, love

is more important than knowledge, and Bible knowledge must lead to greater love.

And so we see in this matter of things are sacrificed to idols, verse 4 he says, concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, there is no god but one. That's a very clear statement. He says we know that an idol is not really a god.

There is no such thing as an idol god. An idol is made of wood or stone or precious metals, but it's nothing. It's just wood.

Even before it was made it was wood, and after it's made it's wood. Before it was made it was stone, and after it's made it's stone. Before it was made it's gold or silver, and after it's made it's still gold or silver.

It's made no difference. Nothing has come into existence just because that metal or that stone has been shaped in a particular shape, whether the shape of an animal or a human being. We know that.

I mean that's got no value, and it doesn't become a god far from it. He says we know that, and there is only one god. There is no other god, only one, and that's true.

And though he says in verse five there are many so-called gods, whether in heaven or earth, indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one god, the father, from whom are all things, and we exist for him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we exist through him. And that's a very clear statement. He says there are many so-called gods, and he finds that in many religions that men have supposed that there are these different gods, and in heaven and in earth they have gods and lords galore, plenty of them, but to us who have light, who have understood the truth, Jesus Christ has come from heaven to the earth and revealed to us that there is only one god, verse six, from whom are all things, and that is our father, our heavenly father in Christ, from whom are all things.

Every single thing in this universe, every material thing, every single thing came into existence through him, and therefore we exist for him. It is for him that we exist. We have to live for God, and there is only one Lord in the whole universe, only one Lord, and that is Jesus Christ.

A very clear statement. One god, our father, only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things. In other words, he's the one who made everything, the second person of the trinity, and we exist through him means he's the one who gives us life, physical life and spiritual life.

But he says, verse seven, and this is a plain statement of fact, this knowledge of ours is not shared by all men. All men do not have light on this, because many have come from heathen backgrounds to the Christian faith, and so they have been accustomed to idols in their past life. They've been familiar right up until now.

They've been familiar with idols. They have this conscientious fear of idols, and even though they've given it all up now that they've become Christians, they are disturbed when they eat food sacrificed to idols, because they eat it as if it were sacrificed to idol, in the sense they still regard that meat as food sacrificed to an idol, and in that sense of being consecrated in an heathen way, and they think of that meat as an idolatrous sacrifice, and therefore their consciences being weak are defiled. They are over scrupulous, and their conscience is contaminated and polluted by their eating.

Their conscience is not easy. Now we know that there's really nothing in that, because if you place a piece of meat or some food in front of an idol, it's just like placing it in front of a block of wood. It makes no

difference at all, but he says the others don't feel so free in their conscience, and therefore what should we do? We can either live according to knowledge, or we can live according to love.

If we live only according to knowledge, we say, well, I couldn't care less about the feeling of my brothers and sisters. I'm just going to do what pleases me, but if we live according to love, we have to show consideration to the feelings of our brothers and sisters when we are in their presence. He says, let me tell you one basic fact about food.

Our acceptance to God, verse eight, our acceptance by God is not a matter of food. God's approval is not based on the food we take. You see, God doesn't care whether we eat this meat or not.

Our food cannot change our place in God's sight. We know that. That's very clear.

We do not lose anything by not eating. We don't gain anything if we eat. Spiritually, there is absolutely no advantage or disadvantage in eating a particular thing.

Let's get that basic principle clear. But he says, just take care that your liberty does not become a stumbling block to the weak. You know very well that if you eat that food, you're not going to be more spiritual.

If you don't eat it, you're not going to be any less spiritual. But just be careful that that liberty which you have does not cause a weaker Christian to fall into sin. Because, you see, he may see you sitting there, verse 10, having, you have knowledge, of course, you've got light on this matter, and you're dining there in an idol's temple, and it means nothing to you, because you know that idol is just a block of wood or stone, and he sees you partaking of a meal in that heathen temple restaurant, and his conscience is disturbed when he does the same thing, because he's encouraged to do it.

He sees you, as an older brother, eating there, and he's encouraged, but he's got a delicate conscience there, and even though your conscience is not troubled when you sit in that heathen temple restaurant and eat, his conscience is, and he, because his conscience is weak, and he stumbles. He begins to think, eat things, sacrifice to idols, which disturbs his conscience. And what happens? What is the end result of that? Your brother is ruined.

His conscience is ruined, and ultimately that affects many other areas of his life. This brother, for whom Christ died, because of your superior knowledge, you're bringing spiritual disaster to a weaker brother. Now, this is the danger of living merely by knowledge.

We are to live by love, and he says, when you sin like this, against your brothers, verse 12, and wound or damage their weak conscience, you're really sinning against Christ. Now, many people don't see that, that when you sin against a brother, you're sinning against Christ. Paul understood that, because when he was persecuting the Christians, and he met Jesus on the Damascus road, Jesus did not ask Paul, why are you persecuting my believers? He said, why are you persecuting me? Because he was the head, and it was Christ's body on earth that Paul was touching.

When you wound the body of Christ, you are wounding Christ. When you sin against a member of the body of Christ, you're sinning against Christ. But you may say, I'm not sinning.

I'm just doing what I have freedom to do. This applies in many other areas too, not just in the matter of eating food offered to idols, that we should not do things that are going to cause other people to stumble, if

those things don't improve our acceptance before God. And therefore, Paul says, as far as I'm concerned, I'll tell you my position, and here's the position of a spiritual man, verse 13.

If my eating food offered to idols is going to make my brother sin, well, I'm going to abstain from that type of food then, lest I be the occasion of my brother's sin. I don't want to give him a reason for stumbling or sinning. Now, a carnal Christian does not take that attitude.

The carnal Christian's attitude is, well, I couldn't care less what's going to happen to my brother. He should be strong. I'm just going to be concerned about myself.

That's the wrong attitude. Paul had spoken about this to the Romans as well. In Romans 14, he writes about this.

We must not seek only to please ourselves. Jesus did not please himself. And as I said, this principle applies to many other areas.

There may be certain things which we may say are right. For example, in a country like India, the matter of dating people of the opposite sex, we may say, well, I've got nothing wrong in mind. Yet, if it is going to stumble other people in the social culture in which we live, a spiritual Christian will abstain from it.

And we can apply that to many areas. The principle of 1 Corinthians 8, that we want to live for God and be a good testimony for Him. And we don't want to cause, do anything that will give room for other people to stumble.

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