

09th October 2019.

**BEING WISE ABOUT CHRISTIAN LIBERTY BY USING LOVE
RATHER THAN KNOWLEDGE.**

I Corinthians 8.

After answering their questions about marriage, Paul turned to one of the most controversial subjects in the letter he received from the Corinthian church: Supposedly, “Can Christians eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols?”

The immediate question does not interest believers today since we do not face that problem.... We literally all eat meat sacrificed to idols and it doesn't bother anyone coz it's the norm..... [In reference to Halaal meat..... Allah.....]

But the wider issue of “Christian liberty” does apply to us, because we face questions that Paul never faced. Is it right for Christians to attend the theater? Should a believer have a television set in his home? To what extent can a Christian get involved in politics? And the more that often come up in our “Bridge fellowship discussions.

In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul enunciated four basic principles that would guide believers in making personal decisions about those “questionable” areas of the Christian life. The first of the four principles that is covered in chapter 8 is that **“Knowledge must be balanced by love”**.

And in light of our general theme of the study of Corinthians which is **“Growing in Christ”** we can see Paul addressed himself primarily to the strong Christians in the church, believers who had spiritual knowledge and experience and who understood their authority and freedom in Christ. It is the strong who must care for the weak. And we'll go through an entire chapter and a half in his letter to the Romans to have clearer light shed on the subject. (Rom. 14-15:6).

The question of meats offered to idols is dealt with in chapter 8 and 10. But we shall only look at chapter 8 tonight.....[*Reading of chapter*]

There were two sources of meat in the ancient world: the regular market (where the prices were higher) and the local temples (where meat from the sacrifices was always available.....). The strong members of the church realized that idols could not contaminate food, so they saved money by purchasing the cheaper meat

available from the temples. Furthermore, probably, if unconverted friends invited them to a feast at which sacrificial meat was served, the strong Christians attended it whether at the temple or in the home.

All of this offended the weaker Christians. Many of them had been saved out of pagan idolatry and they could not understand why their fellow believers would want to have anything to do with meat sacrificed to idols. (In Rom. 14-15, the weak Christians had problems over diets and holy days, but it was the same basic issue....[Reading 14-15:6]) There was a potential division in the church, so the leaders asked Paul for counsel.

Paul called to their attention three important factors.

Knowledge. vs 1-2

Instead of talking about food, Paul first talks about the principles of knowledge and love. Christian behavior is founded on love, not knowledge; and the goal of the Christian life is not knowledge, but love.

The Corinthians were enriched in spiritual knowledge (1Cor.1:5) and were, in fact, rather proud of their achievements. They knew that an idol was nothing, merely the representation of a false god who existed only in the darkened minds of those who worshiped it. The presence of an idol in a temple was no solid proof that the god existed. (Later, (10) Paul would point out that idolatry was basically the worship of demons.) So the conclusion was logical: A nonexistent god could not contaminate food offered on his altar.

So far, it is the strong Christians who are ahead. Why, then, are the weak Christians upset with them when their position is so logical? Because you don't always solve every problem with logic. Knowledge can be a weapon to fight with or a tool to build with, depending on how it is used. If it "puffs up" then it cannot "build up [edify]." The difference between puffing up and building is striking; Like the difference between a balloon and a building!

A know-it-all attitude is only an evidence of ignorance. The person who really knows truth is only too conscious of how much he does not know. Furthermore, it is one thing to know doctrine and quite something else to know God. It is possible to grow in Bible knowledge and yet not grow in grace or in one's personal relationship with God. The test is love, and he expresses that later in chapter 13:8-13, which is the second factor Paul discussed.

Love. vs 3-6.

Love and knowledge must go together; “speaking the truth in love causes growth in all things into Christ” (Eph.4:15). It has well been said, “Truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy.”

Knowledge is power and it must be used in love. But love must always be controlled by knowledge. (Phill.1:9-11.....). The strong believers in the church had knowledge, but they were not using their knowledge in love. Instead of building up the weak saints, the strong Christians were only puffing up themselves. Paul’s great concern was that the strong saints help the weaker saints to grow and to stop being weak saints. Some people have the false notion that the strong Christians are the ones who live by rules and regulations and who get offended when others exercise their freedom in Christ; but such is not the case. It is the weak Christians who must have the security of law and who are afraid to use their freedom in Christ. It is the weak Christians who are prone to judge and criticize stronger believers and to stumble over what they do. This, of course, makes it difficult for the strong saints to minister to their weaker brothers and sisters.

It is here that love enters the picture, for “love builds up” and puts others first. When spiritual knowledge is used in love, the stronger Christian can take the hand of the weaker Christian and help him to stand and walk so as to enjoy his freedom in Christ. You cannot force-feed immature believers and transform them into giants. Knowledge must be mixed with love; otherwise, the saints will end up with “big heads” instead of enlarged hearts. A famous preacher used to say, “Some Christians grow; others just swell.”

Knowledge and love are two important factors, for knowledge must be balanced by love if we are to use our Christian freedom in the right way.

But there is a third factor.

Conscience. vs7-13.

The word conscience simply means “to know with,” and it is used thirty-two times in the New Testament. Conscience is that internal court where our actions are judged and are either approved or condemned (Rom. 2:14-15). Conscience is not the law; it bears witness to God’s moral law. But the important thing is this: conscience depends on knowledge. The more spiritual knowledge we know and act on, the stronger the conscience will become.

Some Christians have weak consciences because they have been saved only a short time and have not had opportunity to grow. Like little babes in the home, they must be guarded carefully. Other saints have weak consciences because they will not grow. They ignore their Bibles and Christian fellowship and remain in a state of infancy (1Cor.3:1-4; Heb.5:11-14).

But some believers remain weak because they are afraid of freedom. They are like a child old enough to go to school, who is afraid to leave home and must be taken to school each day.

The conscience of a weak Christian is easily defiled (vs 7), wounded (vs12), and offended (vs13). For this reason, the stronger saints must defer to the weaker saints and do nothing that would harm them. It might not harm the mature saint to share a feast in an idolatrous temple, but it might harm his weaker brother. Vs10 warns that the immature believer might decide to imitate his stronger brother and thus be led into sin.

It is important to note that the stronger believer defers to the weaker believer in love only that he might help him to mature. He does not “pamper” him; he seeks to edify him, to help him grow. Otherwise, both will become weak.

We are free in Christ, but we must take care that our spiritual knowledge is tempered by love, and that we do not tempt the weaker Christian to run ahead of his conscience. Where knowledge is balanced by love, the strong Christian will have a ministry to the weak Christian, and the weak Christian will grow and become strong.

Then we'll all keep growing in Christ Jesus and our true knowledge of Him as our Lord and Saviour.