

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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Introduction: There was correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian Church about which we have no record. Apparently, in a letter which we do not have, the Corinthians had written to Paul asking him to address certain concerns. Beginning in Chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, Paul begins to answer the questions the Corinthian Elders had addressed to him as an Apostle. The third of these concerns eating food which had been offered in sacrifice to idols.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Verses 1-7a

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. ³ But whoever loves God is known by God.

⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

⁷ But not everyone possesses this knowledge.

- When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, many people in that pagan city worshipped idols. They believed that these idols were, in truth, gods. They sacrificed animals in worship to please these false gods. Remember that Corinth was rampant with the worship of false gods. In many ancient cities, like Corinth, the number of animals offered in sacrifice on a daily basis was overwhelming. The priests of these religions resolved that a good way to increase the revenue of their temples was to offer token animals in sacrifice each day and to butcher the rest for sale to the public. Over time, the priests cornered the meat market. The only place that you could buy meat

was in a butcher shop controlled by some temple. So, the Christians in Corinth were concerned. Was it all right for them to purchase meat at a temple butcher shop, since this meat was offered in sacrifice to a false god? Some of them did this without concern. There was nowhere else to buy meat. Others were worried about the practice. They asked Paul what they should do.

- In answering the question, Paul appears to go off on a tangent about knowledge. He says that we all have some knowledge or information about certain things. And when we know something, we often become conceited thinking we are so wise. Knowledge “puffs us up” with satisfaction and pride. However, we, who are Christian, do not act out of personal pride or satisfaction. Like Jesus, we seek to love other people. Loving people into a relationship with the true God is our goal and intention.
- He then lists what we know. 1. An idol is nothing more than an image made by a man. It is not a god. The god it represents does not exist. 2. There is only one God, our Father, YHWH. 3. There is only one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom we are saved. 4. But not every person knows this.

Verses 7b-8

Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

- Even some Christians are still prone to think like the people of the world. They still think that idols represent gods that exist. And since they believe this they feel it is improper to eat meat that has been offered to an idol.
- This meat is just meat. It does not have any spiritual value. But they think that it does.

Verses 9-13

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against

Christ. ¹³ ***Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.***

- So, someone who does not share your knowledge of things sees you eating or buying your meat in a temple butcher shop and concludes that you are worshipping the god to whom the meat was offered. You know you are not because you know that there is only one God, but they jump to the wrong conclusion on the basis of your behavior. So they do what they see you doing, but in their minds, by following your example, they are worshipping a false god and in so doing deny that there is only one God. Thus, your knowledge leads them into sinful behavior. They are destroyed by your knowledge.
- In doing this, you have led them into sin, and that becomes sin for you.
- Paul concludes that while it is OK to buy meat in a temple butcher shop, if that act causes another Christian to fall into sin, you should not do it. It is an unloving act to cause your brother or sister in Christ to sin. Since we are motivated by love, we must be careful not to cause a Christian to sin. We must remember that knowledge puffs up, but we live in love.

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