

Sermon: Be Careful with Freedom (in Christ).

Text: I Corinthians 8:1-13 ESV

Gary L. Wackler

March 12, 2023

Introduction: Do you understand that freedom can be a dangerous commodity? I am free to do many things, but not all things may benefit you or me.

Last week we heard one of the questions about being single or married that Paul had been asked. He said it was better to be single, but he also said that some should marry. Every choice we make should be made for the glory of God.

Is there such a thing as “freedom of choice?” Once I select a choice, I am not free to do another at the same time. Any behavioral change should be done in light of how this makes God look to others! If I am married I should not act as if I am single and vice versa. Some, I think, struggle with how much they can be like the world while still being “in Christ.” Others, I am afraid, try so hard to be in Christ, and it is defined many times by all the behaviors they do not engage in (**the difference b/w Universalists and Amish**).

This whole discussion Paul also brings up in Romans 14-15 about who is weak and who is strong. We can’t always tell who is weak or strong in the faith by what they do or don’t do. One principle is sure: **Romans 15:7 ESV** 7 Therefore welcome (**receive, KJV; accept, NIV**) one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Depending on your parents and where and how you grew up some things are considered wrong even when they are not. Smoking, drinking, dancing, cursing and I added country music to my list for my children. :) Everyone has a different backdrop including Scripture as to what is right and wrong. And the Gentiles in Corinth did not have the same background as the mostly Jewish-background Christians in Antioch. Corinthian Christians had been told that eating food sacrificed to idols was wrong. To do that would violate their consciences which is a sin.

I. Knowledge and Love (vv. 1-3)

I Corinthians 8:1 ESV 1 Now concerning[a] food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.

Footnote: [a] 1 Corinthians 8:1 The expression Now concerning (peri de) introduces a reply to a question in the Corinthians' letter to Paul; see 7:1

A. Knowledge can be prideful (v. 1).

We have all met people who are full of themselves; they felt because of their education, they are better than others. Our culture elevates higher education. You can see the doctoral candidate receiving the hood and stoles, different colors and stripes on their robes and special caps with tams on top.

FB post - Someone ask a child why some ministers wore collars, and the child said he thought it might be to keep fleas away for 30 days.

I learned long ago that there are different kinds of knowledge and different kinds of people. If I am required to address people by their titles, we are never going to be real close. Pride comes from being enamored by yourself rather than thoughtful and caring for others.

B. Love builds up (v. 1).

“While knowledge may make people proud, love builds up.” - Leon Morris, p. 121

cf. Philips, “while knowledge may make a man look big, it is only love that can make him grow to his full stature.”

Q. All the spiritual gifts Paul will write about in this letter (chapters 12-14, especially) are for the benefit of whom?

A. others, to build them up, to benefit them

C. Knowledge is always incomplete (v. 2).

I Corinthians 8:2 ESV ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

Leon Morris (p. 121) again says, “There is no point in priding oneself on what is inevitably partial and incomplete.”

I Corinthians 13:11-13 ESV ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

All of us I am sure can point to things we thought we knew in the past, but think differently about now. The problem arises when we think we know it all. That is a significant problem among teenagers, but also can afflict the elderly and everyone in between.

I have come to understand the more you know, the more you realize you know little.

D. Love produces a relationship with God (v. 3).

I Corinthians 8:3 ESV 3 But if anyone loves God, he is known by God (him).

Love is about relationship. It is the difference between knowing about God and knowing Him. Demons also know God, but relationally they will at the end be separated from God's presence and damned to eternal hell.

Galatians 4:9 ESV 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

II Timothy 2:19 ESV 19 But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Even the new covenant requires obedience. God will never fail to love us, and we need to do the same in return.

II. God and Idols (vv. 4-6)

A. Idols are not real (v.4).

I Corinthians 8:4-5 ESV 4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." 5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—

Paul elaborates this further in **I Corinthians 10:19-20 ESV** 19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.

Strong Christians do not recognize any God but Yahweh, but weaker brothers and sisters may not be able to have any contact with these so-called gods and myths without being pulled back into idol worship. Like bad company corrupts, or an alcoholic goes back into a bar for a coke, or an addict gets around drugs or porn, etc.

B. People think differently (vv. 4-5).

The thought here is: If these so-called gods do not exist, and of course in reality they do not, then where is the harm in eating a little meat from the pagan temple? To most Jews this would not be a serious temptation, but to a Gentile who grew up with it going to all kinds of social and public celebrations, it was a potential problem.

Later in I Corinthians we hear this: **I Corinthians 12:1-3 ESV** ¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

C. There is one God (v. 6a).

I Corinthians 8:6 ESV ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

God is the author of all creation, and creation is for the glory and benefit of God. Jesus Christ is called Lord here, and is the Agent that God uses in creating everything and everyone. Not only did Jesus create us, we are redeemed by Him, and the Holy Spirit resides in us, if we are His new creation.

Paul tells us why we were created in another letter to the Corinthian church. **II Corinthians 5:17-18 ESV** ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

D. Jesus is Lord (v. 6b)!

The title used by Paul for Jesus is **κύριος**. The pagan people of Corinth called Caesar, Lord, however, Jesus was God! Caesar was an ordinary man with a position of power. Yahweh (YHWH, tetragrammaton) is the written designation for God, but the name was not spoken. Adonai was put in place to get around the utter sacredness of the NAME. In **Acts 20:28 ESV** ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of **God**,[a] which he obtained with his own blood.[b]

Footnotes: [a] Acts 20:28 Some manuscripts of the **Lord**

[b] Acts 20:28 Or with the blood of his Own

III. Not Everyone Knows God the Same (vv. 7-12).

A. Some Christians have weak consciences (v. 7).

I Corinthians 8:7 ESV 7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Here in Corinth a “strong” brother/sister might be able to do something without even a twinge of conscience while the “weak” person may feel extreme guilt.

Craig Blomberg, (p. 162) adds : “The weak conscience” was not a poorly developed sense of morality or propriety, as modern use of the expression might often imply, but rather the overscrupulous restrictions they placed on believers’ freedom in Christ.”

“Notice that Paul gives no advice either to the strong or to the weak on the question of how weak consciences could be strengthened.” - Conzelmann, p. 147

Also, “this is an example of the Corinthian humanity which allows our brother to stand as the man he is, not as the man he ought to be according to some (my) ideal standard.” - Conzelmann, p. 147 - n.17

B. Don’t be a stumbling block (vv. 8-9).

I Corinthians 8:8-9 ESV 8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block (**hindrance, scandal, trap**) to the weak.

Another of Paul’s thoughts helps fill in our understanding here: **Romans 14:14 ESV** 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. - **but not necessarily for others...**

Eating food is an indifferent activity. We should never insist that someone have the same views on unimportant ideas. In **verse 8** it reads - **We are no worse off if we do not eat.** The word (ὕστερον) can be translated “to fall short” or lack. This is the same word used in **Romans 3:23 ESV** 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

This may be why “Jeremias takes the meaning to be ‘Food will not bring us before God’s judgment seat.’” - quoted by Bruce, p. 81

And on that final day: **Romans 14:10-12 ESV** 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess[a] to God.”

12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Footnotes: [a] Romans 14:11 Or shall give praise

The word translated “freedom” in v. 9 (ESV and NIV), and “liberty” in the KJV, is the idea of authority and right. But just because you can do something does not mean you should. One should ask is this helpful, or could it hurt someone’s relationship with me or with God.

We never want to be a “stumbling block,” an obstacle that might cause a fall or that makes progress difficult (Morris, p. 125).

Not one of us lives in a vacuum. Being a part of Christ’s Church, we have responsibilities for each other.

C. Be an encourager to the weak (v. 10).

I Corinthians 8:10 ESV 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge **eating[c]** in an idol’s temple, will he not be **encouraged**,[d] if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?

Footnote: [c] 1 Corinthians 8:10 Greek **reclining at table; pretty intimate setting**
[d] 1 Corinthians 8:10 Or fortified; Greek built up

Illus. Scavenger Hunt - Crash Landing Bar in Midland, MI; Decker’s Bar Elder mtgs.

“It is not so much that what you do may be wrong, but how a weaker brother may understand your conduct.” (Conzelmann, p. 149)

We want to encourage a spiritually healthy lifestyle and not damage a person’s sense of right and wrong by following our lead.

D. Do not sin against Christ (vv. 11-12).

I Corinthians 8:11-12 ESV 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. 12 Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

There is a parallel passage we could read here: **Romans 14:15 ESV** 15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not **destroy** the one for whom Christ died.

This common NT Greek word used here (**απολλυμι**) is understood differently by commentators. So what do we do? I think Conzelmann is correct in his understanding. He says the word “must not be taken in a weakened sense as moral ruin; here as elsewhere it means eternal damnation. It is true that Paul is addressing himself to the strong in terms of warning and is speaking of a possibility; but in so doing he of course presupposes the idea that the Christian, too, can lose his salvation.” - p. 149, n. 38

The same word is used in **John 3:16 ESV** 16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

So Paul says, that sinning against a brother is like sinning against Christ. Paul remembers his experience with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. **Acts 9:4-5 ESV** 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” 5 And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

Everything a Christian does is an action for or against Christ. **Matthew 25:40-41 ESV** 40 And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ 41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Conclusion: So what should we do for a weaker brother or sister?

We should do or not do everything to build them up and show God’s love and patience, never contributing intentionally to their falling into sin and possibly even out of the Body of Christ. Paul writes to the Corinthians this: **I Corinthians 8:13 ESV** 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Ray Stedman story from *What’s Behind Your Influence*. Dr. H. A. Ironside told of an incident that helps here. On one occasion he was at a picnic of Christians, and there was present a man who had been converted from Islam. (His name by the way was Mohammed Ali.) A girl brought a basket of sandwiches up to this man and asked if he would like some. He said, "What kind do you have?" "Oh," she said, "I'm afraid all we have left are ham or pork." He said, "Don't you have any beef?" She replied, "No, they are all gone."

"Well," he said, "then I won't have any." She, knowing that he was a Christian, said to him, "Well, sir, I am really surprised. Don't you know that, as a Christian, you are freed from all these food restrictions, and that you can eat pork or ham or whatever, if you like?" He said, "Yes, I know that. I know I am free to eat pork, but I am also free not to eat it. I'm still involved with my family back in the Near East, and I know that when I go home once a year, and I come up to my father's door, the first question he will ask me is, 'Have those infidels taught you to eat the filthy hog meat yet?' If I have to say to him, 'Yes, father,' I will be banished from that home and have no further witness in it. But if I can say, as I have always been able to say, 'No, father, no pork has ever passed my lips,' then I have admittance to the family circle and I am free to tell them of the joy I have found in Jesus Christ. Therefore I am free to eat, or I am free not to eat, as the case may be."

What would you give up or not give up to help someone grow into Christ? We do not have to have our rights. We are free to give them up at anytime the situation warrants it. Though we have the rights, we also have the right not to exercise them for the sake of love, and for the sake of a person's salvation.

This teaching in [chapter 8](#) is not about what you prefer over what I like. This is about what I might do or you might do that would cause sin in another and potentially be lost.

Blomberg, p. 164

“Three timeless principles dominate this chapter:

What is safe for one Christian may not be for another;

True discernment always requires love as well as knowledge;

And believers have no right to demand certain freedoms IF they in turn prove detrimental to those around them.”

“Even less justified is the application of these principles to the “professional weaker brother” - the Christian legalist eager to forbid morally neutral activities even though he or she would never personally indulge in those activities.”

“If the strong should not hurt the weak, neither should the weak accuse the strong of sin.” After all is said and done, LOVE is the key. It is at the center of Paul's ethics...and without it all spiritual gifts prove worthless”