

GAMMA 2017

STUDY 9

1 Corinthians 8

Knowledge or Love

Idol Food

The culinary habits of people in Corinth were very different from the kind of meals we have today with an increasing meat content which our young people now have a taste for courtesy of MacDonalds and the like. Their diet was somewhat more like the older traditional Chinese diet with the predominance of carbohydrates in the form of breads and porridge (in place of our noodles or rice) and very little meat.

In fact, the only time the average citizen would get to eat meat was during a festival. The festivals were almost always religious in significance, invariably held in the temple precincts itself. As such the meat served must have always been offered to idols beforehand. The meat was either burned before the idols as a “burnt” offering or placed before the idols on a table much like the traditional Chinese would place food before their ancestors. Some of the food was also given to the worshippers. Even in the market place the meat that one could buy very often had been meat offered to idols before hand. This was more often bought and consumed only by the wealthy with plenty of spare cash.

Questions

- 1. We know that there were a group of Christians who were going to the temples and eating food offered to idols and this had caused a stir amongst other church members. Why were the reasons these particular Christians give to justify their actions? V1,4,8**

“We all possess knowledge v1

“An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” v4

These were slogans bandied about by the Corinthians to form the basis of their actions. They stated that they knew that idols have no separate independent reality outside the minds of those who worship them. There is only one God in the universe. Why should they refrain from food offered to nonexistent entities?

In verse 8 they argue that food is a matter of indifference to God. God does not care either way whether they eat of the food or they do not as the food by itself has no merit in approaching God.

Knowledge made them superior it made them free and they were only exercising their freedom.

2. How did Paul counter the arguments of these Christians? Vv 1-6

We live in a world where knowledge is power. The more we know the better off we are compared to others who are not so knowledgeable. This applies to our school work, our professional life and in the work place. The Gnostics were a sect of people who had a tremendous influence at the time in society. Many Christians had come out of a background where this was the emphasis and they immediately seized upon accumulating Christian knowledge, or theology in place of gnostic ideals. It was particularly liberating for them as it allowed them to partake of meat offered to idols without a guilty conscience. Paul had to counter this attitude toward knowledge.

He explained to them the true knowledge is not accumulation of data or correct theology but had an end in mind and that end was love. True knowledge manifests in love. Living in a loving way towards others. The end of faith is not knowledge it is love.

Knowledge puffs up of makes a person proud and it reflects his own achievement and status and destroys others. In contrast love build us others which is the end of faith. Thus the person who thinks he has a lot of knowledge is still actually deficient in true knowledge. The one that loves has shown he has true knowledge and is recognised by God himself as having true knowledge.

In Christian ethics “knowledge” must always lead to love. In the Christian faith “knowledge” or “insight” is never an end in itself; it is only a means to a greater end, the building up of others. In verse 4-6 Paul reasserts yes God is one and there are really no other gods but God is the one from whom all things come and for whom we live and need to obey.

3. There was another group of Christians described in verse 7 as having a weak conscience what does this mean?

The weak conscience does not mean weak in the mind or a mind that easily gives in to temptation. The conscience is the moral consciousness of a person. A person with a weak conscience in this context is one who has very rigorous scruples. Because they are so accustomed to associating the food offered to idols as a form of worship, the partaking of these particular foods is ultimately perceived as partaking in the worship of these idols. Although the action in reality makes no difference to God as the Christians had never participated in the actual idol worship after their conversion nevertheless when they partook of these foods they could not but subconsciously

feel as if they were betraying God. Their mind must have told them that eating food offered to idols was alright but their conscience inside screamed otherwise.

The weakness involved is that their “intellectual conviction that there was only one God had not been fully assimilated emotionally.” Thus when encouraged to attend the cultic meals as a form of “edification,” they could not cope with the dissonance between their heads and their hearts, as it were, which would ultimately lead them back into idolatry and thus destroy them (see on v. 11). In this way their moral consciousness is being “defiled,” that is, their past associations with idols mean that a return to the worship of the god by eating it. his/her honor causes them to defile their new relationship with Christ.

4. How were these particular Christians stumbled? V 9-11

These weaker Christians with more scruples will emulate the behaviour of the more matured Christians whose conscience is unaffected by the fact that the meat has been offered to idols. In doing so they will actually act against their own conscience and sin.

5. What is the problem of sinning against our brothers? Vv11-12

It is the same thing as sinning against Christ because this brother is so precious to Christ that He died for Him.

6. Paul’s principle is limiting our own liberty for the sake of our weaker brethren out of love, the stumbling block principle how do we apply this in our own Malaysian society when we are invited to temples or religious festivities where there are food offered to idols?

Discuss individual experiences with regard to this.

7. We are increasingly living in a society where food offered to idols is no longer an issue thus how can we apply this principle in our daily lives? How far should we go out of consideration for our brethren who are weak in faith? (13) Look at the articles on Harry Potter for discussion. Can you discuss other similar issues?

The Harry Potter debate has Christians divided in to those who have seen in the book elements of real life witch craft and suspect the book subtly influences children to occultic practices. On the other hand there are also large numbers of Christians including reputable groups like Focus on the family who say it is not more harmful than reading any fantasy novel.

The principle is to beware of people with weak consciences that is people who are likely to be influenced to believe that the book poses no harm but they come from a background of believing this and Pokemon, Power Rangers and a like are all harmful. These people who are likely to change their stance and act as if it were nothing but in their hearts they may actually feel and still believe they are betraying the Lord by participating in the novel or supporting it. These are the people to be aware of and in their presence we should refrain from actively flaunting our liberties to influence them

There is another group of people who are staunchly against all things like Harry Potter or the Wizard of Oz and see a demon in every closet. They will never cross over and be convinced other wise. They are dogmatically and emphatically against all of this. There is no danger of these people crossing over to injure their own consciences so one should be free to discuss with them and both sides should learn to accommodate each others freedom of lack there of.

Case Histories for Gamma

1 Cor 8

Case 1

Thevani came to faith in Jesus in the last 2 years and was formerly a devout Hindu. She continued to put a mark on her forehead the chakra which in Hinduism represents the third or invisible eye which symbolizes extraordinary perception and spiritual insight. In the last two months several other devout Hindus have also come to faith in Jesus and they too attended the same church as Thevani. They saw that Thevani continued to put the chakra mark on her forehead and wanted to follow her

1. What are the issues or dangers that you can see in this case?
2. What advice can you give Thevani given what you have learnt in 1 Cor 8

Case 2

Emily is a vibrant sociable woman who loves to dance. In fact she was a Latin dancer and since she came to Christ she had been attending church for the last decade. Some church members recently came to her dance studio where she trained and wanted to join. However they were a little shocked at her dance costumes which had a bare back and in their opinion tight fitting outfits that highlighted her assets. They considered the hip movements of the Latin dance provocative. They told her that her dancing was immoral and she should be dressed more conservatively and tone down on hip movements. If she did not do this then they would be stumbled

1. Is this a case of the stumbling block principle?
2. What are they trying to do instead?
3. How should Emily manage the situation?

Case 3

Horace has been invited to a seance to contact the spirit of his long lost brother. It was organised by his parents. Horace has come to faith 3 years ago is considering going. His two church mates William and Jessie want to come along as they also knew his brother. Horace is trying to decide if he will go. He believes its just all hocus pocus rubbish they are doing and he is just trying to please his parents by going along. However if he does go then his two friends will want to come along.

4. Is this a case of the stumbling block principle
5. What should Horace be trying to do instead?

Case 4

Lynette had just come back from Melbourne after studying and working there for over 15 years. The first few weeks she was back there were already comments that came back to her that her attire was too sexy especially that she showed some cleavage. This was mainly from the older women. A few of the younger youth and young women were however quite encouraged. They wanted to follow Lynette in their dressing style although all their lives they had not dared to do so but they wanted to feel attractive but had not tried so far as it was not the custom of church women to dress like this and they also felt a little naughty if they had done it. However Lynette's example certainly emboldened them.

1. Is this a case of the stumbling block principle?
2. What should Lynette do in this case?

Case 5

Martha is a modern vivacious outgoing young woman in her 40's who is active in church. She loves a nice glass of wine and seldom drinks to the extent she gets drunk. She can handle her liquor. She has no issue with taking alcohol and understands that it is the excess of alcohol that is wrong and not the drink itself. Her two nieces in their twenties have come for the weekend from Seremban and they come from a strict Christian home where they are taught that consuming alcohol is not right and Christians should stay away from it. It is dinner time and Martha usually has a glass of wine with her dinner but since her nieces are with her what should she do?

1. Is there a stumbling block principle here?
2. How can Martha be a stumbling block to her nieces?
3. What should she do?
4. Martha is on the evangelism committee of a Traditional Baptist church where some members think it is also wrong to drink wine. There is an event coming soon in the church and someone suggested the church should allow the provision of wine for those who want it. What do you think?