

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 10

The Gospel in an Idolatrous Culture

1 Corinthians 8

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

“1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

Background

1. a) In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul explains how the Corinthian believers should handle cultural issues. What was the main cultural issue they were faced with?

- Food offered to idols

b) As Christians, we may face other cultural issues compared to the Corinthians. What are the cultural issues that we need to deal with?

- Refer to the video lecture for examples

1 Corinthians 8:1-6

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A. Knowledge alone cannot be the sole basis for action (v. 1-6)

2. a) What happens when one has knowledge and only knowledge?

- Pride, divisions, boasting

b) What should true knowledge come with? Refer to v. 3.

- True knowledge comes with love

- What we know is not important

- What is important is that God knows us - Love is a sign of that

- Love is the evidence of true knowledge

1 Corinthians 8:7-8

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idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.
8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.”

B. Different people have different levels of knowledge and consciences (v. 7-8)

3. Who were the “weak” Christians? Refer to 1 Cor. 8:7-8.

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 honour causes them to defile their new relationship with Christ.

4. Who were the “strong” Christians? Refer to 1 Cor. 8:4-6.

5. What is the differentiator between these 2 groups?

- Knowledge

1 Corinthians 8:9-12

“9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”

C. People are stumbled by imitating our behaviour but not having our conscience (v. 9-11)

6. How were the “weaker” Christians stumbled?

- 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.

7. What is the problem of sinning against our brothers?

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

1 Corinthians 8:13

“13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

1 Corinthians 10:25

“25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake;”

D. True freedom is found in the exercise of both love and knowledge (v. 13, 1 Cor. 10:25-29)

- 8. 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?**

Summary Question

- 9. a) We know that there was 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
- 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.

b) 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.
- 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.

Takeaway

- A. Knowledge alone cannot be the sole basis for action (v. 1-6)**
 - a. Knowledge alone causes pride and divisions
 - b. Our knowledge is always deficient
 - c. True knowledge includes love
- B. Different people have different levels of knowledge and consciences (v. 7-8)**
- C. People are stumbled by imitating our behaviour but not having our conscience (v. 9-11)**
- D. True freedom is found in the exercise of both love and knowledge (v. 13, 1 Cor. 10:25-29)**

Case Study

Case 1 – Past Beliefs

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 – Latin Dancing

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 of 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 – Medium

Horace has been invited to a seance (necromancy) to contact the spirit of his long lost brother. It was organised by his parents. Horace came to faith 3 years ago and 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 it's 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.

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

Case 4 – Dressing

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. It this a case of the stumbling block principle?

2. What should Lynette do in this case?

Case 5 – Wine

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?