

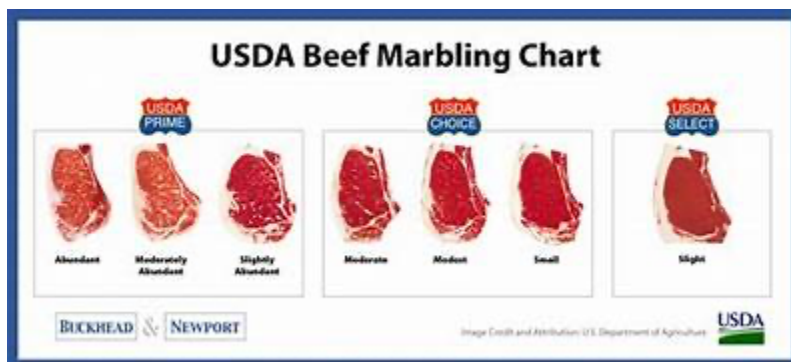
20260412 1 Corinthians 8 – Don't Be a Stumbling Block

Read the chapter. Then pray.

This is a message about deferring our own liberties to the benefit of our brothers and sisters. We are free to do many things as believers, but Paul will teach us here that our liberties should always be restrained when it is for the spiritual benefit of others. In Corinth, as some were coming to Christ, their consciences bothered them when they would eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. The big question is how can we apply the principles that we find in this passage to the times in which we are living?

We can read things like this, but it's not really something we would encounter in our own lives, so we must dig to see how my rights as a Christian must sometimes be set aside out of love for another believer. Rights are important to us in America. We talk about them a lot. They are so important to us that our Founding Fathers created a Bill of Rights that goes with our Constitution. This chapter is about setting all kinds of rights aside to help others in their walk with Christ. Paul says we lay down our lives to keep our brother or sister in Christ from stumbling.

There are two specific verses that are the centerpiece of this chapter. Please look at verse 9 followed by the last verse, 13. ⁹ *But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.* ¹³ *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:9-13, NKJV).*



Let me explain all of this clearly. Regular sacrifices were made to all the pagan deities in Corinth. In the course of sacrificing an animal to a pagan god, there was a lot of meat left over. So that extra meat would be sold in the marketplace, and marked as “sacrificed to a god.” That was a way of saying that it was “top drawer” stuff,

meaning that the meat was the very high quality. It would be like meat marked at HEB as “USDA Prime, Choice, or Select Beef.” The problem was that some of the Corinthians who were new believers felt uncomfortable eating it. They felt that if this meat was sacrificed to a pagan idol, it would defile them. They had come out of that kind of lifestyle, but their thinking was still in it. They thought that meat that had been sacrificed to a pagan god had a certain power to it. Paul had to deal with this, so let's take the chapter verse by verse and figure out how this might apply to our own lives.

8¹ *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. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3, NKJV).*

Paul suggests that those with solid theological knowledge are well aware of how to handle this problem. Those with knowledge know and understand that there is no power in that kind of sacrificed meat. It has no power over us at all; and there is absolutely nothing wrong with eating it. But Paul comes right out of the gate with a warning. He is saying that you may have a solid understanding of meat offered to idols but proceed with caution. Knowledge about such things can easily become a matter of pride instead of edifying the weaker brother or sister. Be careful because you can get puffed up with pride in a second, and in doing so you won't exercise the kind of love that God requires of you. And, God knows exactly what's going on in that person when He sees it happening.

"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. (1 Corinthians 8:4-6, NKJV).

In verse 4, Paul states the first truth, and that is that food that has been offered to an idol isn't really affected at all because an idol is nothing to be concerned about. It's a mere object, a thing that has been created by the hands of men out of wood, stone, gold, or silver. In verse 5, Paul says that these items have been considered by many to be "gods," as many have set up their lives to worship them, yet we know they are just "so-called." There is nothing real or powerful about them. We who are believers don't participate in these beliefs or these kinds of so-called gods. There is One God, and it is Him alone whom we worship and unto Whom we give obedience. We have one Lord and Master, and that is Jesus Himself.

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. (1 Corinthians 8:7-8, NKJV).

But the reality is that not everyone has a solid understanding of this. Not everyone fully understands their freedom in Christ or that we are not bound by the shackles some of us have left at work in our own imaginations. The bottom line is that nothing we eat or drink makes us holy in any sort of way. Some Corinthians came to understand this, and they could go down to the market to buy meat that had been sacrificed to Apollo, Aphrodite, or Poseidon. They did this with a clear and clean conscience. In Corinth, there was a large temple to Apollo from about 500 BC. He was the god of knowledge, poetry, music, and civic life. Worshipers would go to that temple and often bring some animal that was of the highest quality that they had, and they would give it to the priests to sacrifice it. Aphrodite's temple featured temple prostitutes and animal sacrifices for sexual healing and such problems. Poseidon was the god of the sea, whom they thought would protect the sailors who were sailing in and out of the city. There were many other gods in their pantheon, and many of them were worshipped through animal sacrifice.

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. (1 Corinthians 8:9-13, NKJV).

These verses are the heart and soul of Paul's message. He cautions that those with the proper knowledge of gods, sacrifices, and such must be very careful. Although they are free to eat of those meats offered to those false gods, this liberty can become a stumbling block to other believers. The concern, love, and care that we should have for others should ALWAYS preempt and eclipse the liberty that we ourselves have in Christ.

The classic cited example of this is the believer's belief and handling of alcohol. The Bible is clear that wine (alcohol) is a blessing from God. Psalm 104:14-15 declares:

¹⁴He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,
And vegetation for the service of man,
That he may bring forth food from the earth,
¹⁵ And wine that makes glad the heart of man,
Oil to make his face shine,
And bread which strengthens man's heart. (NKJV).

I think that while I'm talking about the great blessing of wine being provided by God I must also talk about the warnings that go along with it. Drunkenness is a sin, and Scripture tells us. Likewise, there are many inherent dangers in being too involved with alcohol. Paul tells us,

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.
(Ephesians 5:18 NIV)

There are other great warnings concerning alcohol in Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35, Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 6:10 and many others.

There are many other Scriptures that caution us as to the destructive possibilities that come with the consumption of alcohol. Many of you might have grown up in households where you experienced firsthand the injury and torment that came from alcohol abuse. Others of you received this blessing from the Lord and turned it into an idol in your lives. It got a hold of you, and you couldn't put it down.

Paul is saying that the believer is one who must understand that biblically wine is a blessing that must be enjoyed with great control, and one must be ever so careful with that knowledge. In an exercise of love, that believer must be careful not to let his drinking become a stumbling block to

a believing man or woman who might have a problem in this area. Paul, in essence, is saying, in the case of alcohol, it would be better to never drink again if it was going to affect another brother or sister negatively.

Knowledge vs. Stumbling Blocks

I want to expand this conversation about alcohol and other examples I can think of because it is just one example of something that we are free to enjoy as believers that may become a stumbling block to others. Every generation has its own things that might become stumbling blocks for others. Let's talk about them collectively.

There are four practical ways that we can apply this Scripture to our lives this morning. I'm going to mention alcohol, entertainment, food, and other habits.

Drinking Alcohol – I've spoken about alcohol in general, but I'd like to share a bit of personal



experience. I grew up in a Scots-Irish family. Alcohol was always present in our home, but it was not central in any way whatsoever. It was never the focus of anything. When we had a family party, alcohol was not a part of it, but we were not tea totalers. It was a good way to be brought up because we did not see alcohol as something evil. It was there under the kitchen sink, along with the ammonia, Clorox, and soap. Mom and Dad might bring it out a couple of times a year for a holiday, or just for a drink on a

Sunday afternoon with dinner. I never saw my mother or my father inebriated ever. Interestingly, some of us in this congregation grew up in a neighborhood together, and I never saw their parents inebriated either. Alcohol just wasn't a big central part of our upbringing.

Other families had a much different experience. The use of alcohol precipitated abuse and heartache. So, if we as believers are having a small group dinner and someone who is present has had a problem with alcohol in the past, we are to lay it down. We don't need to preach to the recovered alcoholic about freedom in Christ and how the Bible is okay with alcohol. You don't need to pour yourself a drink in front of them just to show them how free you are. Your small choice to have something non-alcoholic will preach louder than any sermon you can come up with. As believers, we must always be aware of another's leanings and weaknesses in that area and realize they are paramount (that means they're super important). It is a matter of putting aside one's knowledge about their rights or freedom to participate in something; yet exercising certain constraints on that freedom to assist another to not stumble in their walk with Christ.

Social Media and Public Exposure



We now live in a goldfish bowl like never before. Be careful about what you post on Facebook, Instagram, or anywhere. Why? Because what you post might stir up another brother or sister to post things that can hurt the cause of Christ. I'll give you an example. I have very strong societal and political ideas. I am somewhere between a strict libertarian and an ultra-conservative. I am happy to discuss my political ideas with anyone in a one-on-one conversation, but you will see very little of what I post publicly about my political beliefs. Am I tempted to do so? Oh, you better believe it. Am I free to do it? Absolutely. Knowledge says, "It's my page, and I can post whatever I want to post on it." But I've learned that many who disagree with me, not just politically but religiously, read what I post. Knowledge says, "I have every right to post what I want about my political beliefs." Loves says, "It's my channel of influence." I want to keep the communication open so I can tell others about Jesus and what He has done for them. If I speak publicly in this community, I realize that, as a pastor, I have, in many ways, given up the right to speak on certain issues. I represent each of you when I speak, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, I represent Jesus. Before you hit "post," ask yourself, "Will this build up or tear down others, and will it neutralize the influence that I enjoy?" Knowledge says, "It's my page and I can post whatever I want to post." Love says, "It's my channel of influence and I will walk carefully not causing another to stumble."

Church Traditions and Worship Styles



Some in the Body of Christ prefer loud contemporary music. Others prefer ancient hymns of the faith. Some associate an organ with sacred music, and they feel a guitar is cheap, tawdry, or undignified. Some in here might raise their hands as they worship, and others sit quietly with their heads bowed in reference. Some bring a cup of coffee into the sanctuary, and others are really bothered by that. The "strong" can easily have a smirk on their face or even roll their eyes at some of what they see. Others can say, "_____ is not a big deal to me." Paul says the real "big deal" is your neighbor's conscience.

As you ferret out what your position will be on this or that, ask yourself, "is my preference for how the service might progress worth causing division or strife and discouragement to someone else?"

Cultural Engagement and Gray Areas



When we're talking about holidays things can become a stumbling block as well (think of so many of the hot-button issues surrounding them): Christmas, Easter, Halloween, birthdays, and you can add a lot of other ones. Another gray area is my freedom to meet alone with women for counseling and other reasons. This might be a problem for another brother in Christ, but it is not a problem for me. It is part of what I was trained to do as a lawyer. If I didn't do that it would hamper my ministry greatly. Yet, I don't suggest or recommend that to other men who find it problematic for whatever reason. There are many other gray areas concerning the clothes we wear, tattoos, the music we listen to, and many other things. We must balance our freedom and our knowledge with love for others and sensitivity to their needs. A year or two ago, I took my wife and daughter out to eat at Olive Garden. The waiter was a large Hispanic guy with long gold earrings and makeup on. When he came to get our drink orders, he asked if we all wanted water. I answered, "Yessir, that would be great." I didn't notice, but my daughter said, "Dad, when you said 'yessir' you really riled him up." It was easy to adjust how I addressed him. I don't remember his name, but I just called him by his name, and that solved the problem of whether he wanted to be considered a man or a woman, a her or a them. He watched us pray over our meal and probably overheard our conversation. I just called him by the name on his tag and moved on. I was free to preach to him, but instead I chose to influence him and love him.

Jesus ate with sinners, and He obviously found a way to connect with them. I am sure that he ate with prostitutes, criminals, divorcees, and people who were spiritually offensive. He put his knowledge of their wickedness aside in order to reach out to them and offer His love and His righteousness to them. The ones He had the most trouble with were the religious establishment. So, what am I saying?

Conclusion and Challenge

Our inclination will always be to say to ourselves, "I know my rights, and I'm going to do and say what I want to do and say." But love whispers, "Is the exercise of my rights worth it if it costs me an avenue to influence an unbeliever or causes a brother or a sister to stumble?" Jesus never clung to His rights. He laid down His life so we could be free from the penalty and the power of sin over our lives.

This week, I invite you to do three things:

- 1 Pray, "Lord, show me where my knowledge is puffing me up instead of building others up." By that I mean ask the Lord to show you where you might be "proud" in your spiritual knowledge and understanding of things.
- 2 Perhaps ask someone whom you respect, "Is there anything I do that makes following Jesus harder for you or for others?" Be quiet and listen.

3 This week, restrict yourself in a gray area we've talked about if it might be causing another person a big problem. Whatever you do, do it in love.

The world is not watching us to see how right we are, but rather to see the love of Christ work in and through us. I am not talking about masking or hiding the gospel. But I'm talking about meeting others (believers or unbelievers) at the point of their need. As we studied last week, that is what Jesus did for Mary Magdalene, the two on the Road to Emmaus, for doubting Thomas, and for Peter. Next week, Dr. House will be covering for me, and he'll dig further into what it means when Paul says, "I've learned to be all things to all people." Go today in peace and go in love. You don't ever need to compromise what you know to be biblical truth, but you should be very cautious about using it as a club, or using it in a way that causes another believer confusion, doubt, or trouble in their walk with Christ.

Let us pray.

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