

Parson to Person

1 Corinthians 8

(The Potential Stumbling Block)

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

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. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 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.

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. 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.

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 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? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8 NKJV).

Idolatry

Paul wrapped up the instructions found in Chapter 7 by exhorting the Corinthians to prioritize their lives. He mentioned that those who “worshipped” sexuality, a spouse, kids, possessions, etc., had failed to recognize the temporal nature of such things.

Paul did not suggest that we abandon or mistreat our families, but to the contrary—he called us to properly prioritize our lives and stewardship. However, of note we learned that putting temporal things ahead of those things eternal is idolatry—even when such things are good. Therefore, we must make secondary all things that might interfere with our relationship with the Lord—and/or the eternal. This is why Paul said that we, “...use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31b).

Freedom in Jesus—In the View of Others

Believers have been given tremendous freedom in Jesus, but our freedoms do not include doing those things that harm. Therefore, one must remember that, “*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being*” (1 Corinthians 10:23–24).

Idol Worship

There are many ways in which we might illustrate the problem of idolatry here in America—and are by no means exempt because we have few or no temples to Baal, Ashtoreth, Astarte, Moloch,

Dagon, et al. However, we do see idol worship and must attend to how it applies today.

Having just returned from Maui, I cannot help but think about how idol worship prevails among the native islanders—and is quite easily discovered. However, Americans are not otherwise exempt. Idolatry can take on many forms. For example, idolatry is present in Islam, Hinduism/Buddhism and the practice of YOGA, the worship of the Roman Catholic Mary, etc. Even well-intentioned worship of religious practice can be idolatry! The list one might develop is endless! However, there is a fundamental “god” far too many bow before: self.

Self: The God of Many

Infatuation with self has caused infection in the Body of Christ. Putting self over the Lord (and others) fails to recognize Biblical priority.

Someone, some time ago, created a valuable acronym that has influenced my life: J.O.Y.—Jesus, Others, Yourself. This may prove to be helpful to you too! No believer will ever experience true and Biblical joy unless they put the priorities in order.

Who Serves Who?

It is of note that all false gods are “worshipped” in order to provide something for the worshipper. It might be health, wealth, power, popularity—you name it. This is the worship of self! Sadly, many Christians have a demonically inspired misconception that God is their “errand boy” and that prayer is the method by which “believers” are to command God in order to accomplish their

desires. This “Christianized witchcraft” is indeed heresy. We are here to serve the Lord not that He might serve us!

No God but One

Paul declared that there is no God but one—our Lord (vs. 4). He also taught that the “gods” are nothing more than iconic, demonic entities used by the Devil to distract, discourage, manipulate, and bring destruction upon the “worshippers.” The gods who represent a false creator, false provider, and false redeemer are deceptive spirits that must be identified as such. For this reason, Paul said that *“the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God”* (1 Corinthians 10:20a).

Here in chapter 8 Paul addressed the fact that we all live in the world and that idol worship prevails around us. However, the believer’s freedom in Christ cannot be restricted by the things of this world. Therefore, going to a luau, eating the ceremonial Kalua Pig, or, as was common in Corinth, buying and eating “sacrificial” meat in the market place cannot negatively affect a believer. He wrote, *“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 8:8). However, he did suggest that caring for the less informed when *“using this world”* should be a priority for the mature. He taught, *“beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak”* (vs. 9), for *“Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies”* (vs. 1b). Let us therefore grow in love for others as we genuinely worship God together. Our freedom will allow much! However, if what we do (in the presence of others) causes the weaker brother or sister to stumble—we fail.

May the Lord allow us to grow in freedom, grow in love and keep our priorities in order. J.O.Y. Jesus, Others, Yourself.

I love you all,
Pastor Paul