

When Something Right Is Wrong

(1 Corinthians 8:1-13)

In this chapter, Paul answers a question about eating food sacrificed to idols. The situation in this passage may not apply to us but the principles do. When reading a passage in the Bible, always look for the principles, which are timeless. This chapter addresses **three** principles that reveal **when something right is wrong**, beginning with ...

Biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love (8:1-3)

Paul begins: *Now as touching things offered unto idols (8:1a)*. Most likely, Paul is referring to meals eaten in pagan temples after the meat had been sacrificed to *idols*. The later discussion in 10:23-11:1 concerns food purchased in the market place and then eaten in homes.

Next, Paul writes: *we know that we all have knowledge (8:1b)*. Paul begins by explaining the Corinthian believers are on common ground. They know there are no other gods except the one true God. This *knowledge* is causing some believers to think eating a meal in a pagan temple is insignificant. Technically, there is nothing wrong with this, as Paul points out later, but there is more to consider when eating in a pagan temple. *Knowledge* alone is not enough. Why, according to 1 Corinthians 8:1c?

Apparently, some believers at Corinth were saying, “What the pagans believe is just fairy tales. It doesn’t matter if I go to a pagan temple to eat a great meal.” *Knowledge* alone leads to arrogance. That is why so many college professors are anti-God and anti-Christian. *Knowledge* puffs up and makes people very egotistical.

In the Christian life, *knowledge* must never be separated from *charity* [love] because love edifies, or builds up (8:1d). What does Paul later write about *charity* in the last phrase of 1 Corinthians 13:4?

You can obey every command in the Bible, but if you don’t have love, you can still be guilty of wrong behavior. Acting on biblical *knowledge* without love can harm other believers. However, biblical *knowledge* wrapped in love builds up.

As Christians, we never stop learning and growing. This is why Paul writes: *And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know (8:2)*. This means there is always more to *know* on the subject. You can memorize a verse in the Bible, quote it a thousand times, but yet not fully understand it. There are always other things to consider—a new application or a new insight from which to look at that knowledge. If you want to really know God, Bible knowledge without love is never enough.

That's why Paul writes, *But if any man love God, the same is known of him* (8:3). It is possible to know all about the Bible and not love God. Loving God, not just Bible knowledge, is evidence we are really *known* by God as His children. How does 1 John 4:20a-b express this truth?

The first principle for knowing **when something right is wrong** is **biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love**. The second principle is ...

Edification trumps Christian freedom (8:4-8)

Paul explains: *As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one* (8:4). All Christians know there is just *one* God. However, Paul writes: *For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many)* (8:5). The word *gods* and *lords* refer to different deities in various pagan religions. We know they don't exist, but many people in Paul's day thought they did.

Therefore, Paul writes: *But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him* (8:6). This means *God, the Father* is the source of *all things*, and the Lord Jesus is the Agent through which we receive them. Everything God gives us, He gives us in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3a, Paul praises God the Father and *our Lord Jesus Christ*. Then, what does he write in the next phrase (1:3b)?

Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled (8:7). There are some new believers in Corinth who cannot separate **eating** food sacrificed to idols from actually **worshipping** the idols. Therefore, their immature *conscience* is being *defiled*. Seeing mature believers eat food at pagan temples could lead new or immature believers back into pagan practices. The principle is this: **edification trumps Christian freedom**.

For example, imagine a believer who has a gambling problem with five-card stud or blackjack. Every time he sees a deck of cards, he wants to gamble. Would it be wrong for you to invite him into your home for a game of Euchre? One of the greatest problems among our youth is underage drinking and even alcoholism. Is it wise for a mature Christian to drink in front of them?

Paul explains: *But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse* (8:8). Food is neutral; therefore, we can't gain or lose God's approval by what we eat. Abstaining from certain foods makes us neither more spiritual nor less spiritual. How does the Lord Jesus express this fact in Matthew 15:11?

There are some things Christians shouldn't do because **edification trumps Christian freedom**.

The principles are **biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love, edification trumps Christian freedom**, and ...

Never influence people to violate their conscience (8:9-13)

Any food that is not harmful to our health is okay for Christians to eat (1 Tim. 4:4). However, Paul also writes, *But take heed lest by any means this liberty of your's become a stumblingblock to them that are weak* (8:9). A *stumblingblock* is something that might cause another believer to trip and fall into sin. We must consider how our behavior might affect other believers.

Paul writes specifically about an immature Christian seeing a mature Christian eating in the temple of an idol (8:10). What could be the result (8:11)?

In other words, the *knowledge* that the mature Christian carelessly applied to this situation could cause an immature believer to violate his or her *conscience* and *perish*. The word translated *perish* (APOLLYMI, uh-pol'-loo-me) carries the idea of being ruined by sin. **If something violates a person's conscience, it is wrong for that person.** Therefore, never influence people to violate their conscience. A good conscience is critical for living the Christian life.

Never do anything to encourage a believer to do something that goes against his or her conscience. This is because our consciences are built-in sin detectors that are damaged when violated. Not having a *good conscience* will *shipwreck* your Christian life (1 Tim. 1:19). What does Paul write about false teachers in 1 Timothy 4:2?

When something is *seared* (like with a branding iron), scar tissue covers the burn. Scar tissue is insensitive. Each time you violate your conscience, it is seared just a little more and will eventually destroy your God-given sensitivity to sin. If your sin doesn't bother you, you have a *seared* conscience.

Paul warns: *But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ* (8:12). It is a horrible sin to influence someone to violate their conscience because it violates the second greatest commandment. Write it below (Matthew 22:39b):

So, Paul writes: *Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend* (8:13). The word translated *offend* (SKANDALIZŌ, scan-da-liz'-oh) is the word from which we get our word "scandal." It originally meant "the unseemly conduct of a religious person that discredits religion or causes moral lapse in another." So, something that might not otherwise **be** wrong **is** wrong if it puts a stumbling block in the spiritual path of another believer.

Our culture is obsessed with personal freedoms, and this has greatly influenced the thinking of many Christians. However, according to Philippians 2:3, what is the Christian way?

Something right is wrong if it violates one of these principles: **biblical knowledge must be wrapped in love, edification trumps Christian freedom, and never influence people to violate their conscience.**