

Sunday, January 29, 2017—I Corinthians 8:7-11: Shall the Weaker Brother Perish?

Introduction

- Last week we started a study of I Corinthians 8. In doing so, we observed another one of the Corinthians' questions that Paul addressed was related to meat offered/sacrificed unto idols.
- The first 6 verses are divided into two sections of three.
- In verses 1 through 3 Paul deals with the Corinthians knowledge of “things offered unto idols” and their customary pride with respect to such things. Paul tells them that it is better to be known for loving God and walking in charity than for being puffed up and claiming to know things one doesn't know.
- Verse 4 through 6 deal with the fact that idols are “nothing in the world” and there is only one true Living God. The Godhead made and sustains all things and the Corinthians are “in” God “by” work of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 8:7

- **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.***
- I Corinthians 8:1—every man had knowledge of the pagan practice of offering/sacrificing meat unto idols.
- Not every man had knowledge of the doctrine contained in verses 4 through 6 with respect to idols. Some were eating the meat which belonged to an idol as though it was sacrificed to the idol i.e., with the belief that the idol was something in the world. In other words, they were continuing the “custom” or “practice” that they were engaged in while they were heathen idol worshipers.
- Therefore, some were eating with knowledge of the idol and the foods having been offered in service to that idol. To these people, partaking in the meat would be an insult to God. In this case their conscience is weak and defiled by their lack of knowledge.
- When those who have knowledge willing partake in meat “offered to idols” they run the risk of encouraging their brethren who do not have such knowledge to do something that will violate their conscience.

I Corinthians 8:8

- **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.**

- What one eats or doesn't eat does not commend or present us to God.
 - Romans 5:8—what commends us to God is our faith in the finished work of his son.
- Whether one eats or does not eat the meat offered to idols it does not affect their relationship with God. Why? Our relationship with God was not established by the words of the law but by the hearing of faith.

I Corinthians 8:9

- **But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.**
- *But take heed*—note the contrast and the warning at the head of verse 9. The English word “heed” carries the following meanings according to Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828):
 - To mind; to regard with care; to take notice of; to attend to; to observe.
- So despite the fact that meat doesn’t commend us to God in verse 8, Paul is seeking to warn the Corinthians about something practical with respect to eating such meat.
- *This liberty of yours*—knowing that the idol is nothing in the word, do the Corinthians possess the liberty under grace to eat the meat offered in sacrifice to idols? The answer is yes, they do possess the liberty to so eat. The question is should they?
- *stumblingblock to them that are weak*—Paul’s warning here in verse 9 is that the use of one’s liberty not become a “stumblingblock” to someone who is weak. A “stumblingblock” means, “Any cause of stumbling; that which causes to err” (*Webster’s 1828*).
- In the context, Paul doesn’t want a believer who knows and understands verses 4 through 6 to use their liberty in such a way so as to cause a weaker brother who doesn’t possess such knowledge to defile their conscience or stumble.
- When a strong believer exercise his or her liberty in a way that is determinantal to a weaker believer’s spiritual welfare, i.e., causes stumbling, they have exceeded what is permissible.
- I Corinthians 8:1-3—recall from these verses that Paul opened the chapter by exhorting the Corinthians to walk in charity.
 - Ephesian 5:2—when one saint purposefully uses their liberty in a manner that causes another to stumble they are not walking in love toward their weaker brother.

- I Corinthians 8:9—believers have no right to give up their liberty, but they have perfect liberty to give up their rights.
 - Galatians 5:13—the same liberty that affords the believe the right to eat the meat provides the freed not to eat as well.
- I Corinthians 8:9—don't defile your brother's conscience by paying more attention to your "rights" than to your "responsibilities." In other words, walk in charity toward the brethren.

I Corinthians 8:10-11

- **For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?**
- *For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple*—the one who "hast knowledge" in this verse is the one who understands verses 4 through 6. This person is using the liberty gained from their knowledge that an "idol is nothing" to "sit at meat in the idol's temple."
- Notice that this man is using his liberty in a such a way that he is publicly seen doing so by the weaker brother. In other words, he is faulting his liberty. He is not purchasing the meat and eating it in the privacy of his own home. No, he is doing so publicly.
- *shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols*—this type of conduct on the part of the more knowledgeable saint possess the capacity to emboldened a weaker saint to act in a manner contrary to their conscience.
- Taken together verses 10 and 11 demonstrate that when a weaker brother is constrained or emboldened by one actions to eat meat scarified to idols, he really does sin.
 - Romans 14:14, 23