

# FIRST CORINTHIANS

## Chapter 8

### *Food Offered to Idols*

**Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. 2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. 4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. 7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged,[d] if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. 12 Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.**

The worship of idols in temples in Corinth lay at the center of the lives of the people. And the food which they ate was intimately associated with this idol worship. Meat from animals without blemish was used in sacrifices to the idols. The worshippers could take some of the unused meat home for consumption there. Some of it was sold in the market. People who bought meat in the market could never be quite certain whether it had or had not been dedicated to idols. Furthermore, eating meat at the temples was very much a part of daily social life. It was somewhat like "eating out" in the USA. (Buls)

Paul had evidently discussed this entire matter with the Corinthian Christians. He had told them that the heathen gods and idols were only figments of the imagination. They do not even exist. Therefore, foods which had been dedicated to these idols and gods were not actually contaminated. (Buls)

After Paul left, several questions arose among the Corinthians. Evidently there were two erroneous opinions: (Buls)

1. Some felt that they had unbridled liberty with reference to eating meats;
2. Others felt that they had no liberty at all for such eating.

Paul is about to condemn both opinions. This chapter is exceedingly important in all generations. The problem of eating meats dedicated to idols is far removed from us. But we have problems very much like these which must be dealt with as Paul dealt with them. (Buls)

**8:1-10** Questions had arisen over whether Christians should eat food sacrificed to idols. This food was eaten in the temple dining room (8:7-13), at sacrifices involving actual idol worship (10:14-22), purchased in the marketplace (10:23-26), or eaten in an unbeliever's home (10:27-30). Some in Corinth argued that idols were not real gods, so the sacrifices did not matter and the food could be eaten. Paul agreed that the idols were not real (8:4-6; 10:26), but the decision of whether to eat the food was to be based on the way that other people interpreted that action (8:10; 10:29). Because some Corinthians had formerly worshiped these idols and eaten the meals as if the god were present, their perspective, shaped by these former associations, had to be taken into account. The Corinthians' behavior had to be faithful to God's commands and loving toward their fellow believers in Christ. The situation is different from Romans 14, where Paul instructs the Romans to stop passing judgment on one another in the matter of what foods to eat. In that context, eating or not eating was simply a matter of preference in a situation for which there is genuine Gospel freedom. (TLSB)

**8:1** *Now concerning food.* Another matter the Corinthians had written about. (CSB)

*offered to idols.* Offered on pagan altars. Meat left over from a sacrifice might be eaten by the priests, eaten by the offerer and his friends at a feast in the temple or sold in the public meat market. Some Christians felt that if they ate such meat, they participated in pagan worship and thus compromised their testimony for Christ. Other Christians did not feel this way. (CSB)

The word *eidolothuton* means "what has been offered as a sacrifice to an idol." Various kinds of choice animals were offered to the gods. Part of the meat would be burned on the altar, and part of it would be used for a religious banquet, with the particular god as the honored guest. What was left would then be sold at the marketplace. It is especially this "leftover" meat sold at the marketplace to which Paul is referring, although in verse 10 he addresses people participating in the banquet meal as well. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

*knowledge.* Explained in vv. 2–6. (CSB)

Appealing to the slogan, "we all have knowledge," some of the Corinthians had taken a broad view of their entitlement to eat food that had been offered to idols. Apparently they felt they could eat such food with impunity on a variety of social occasions, and even recline at table in dining rooms such as those near the Lerna fountain, since (so they might argue) these had only a loose connection with the temple of Asklepios. Whether some also had the temerity to drink the cup (*κυκεών*) or eat from the dish (*κέρνος*) in the dining rooms on the lower terrace of Demeter's sanctuary is difficult to say. But the wording of 10:19–22 suggests that some may not have had scruples about going this far, reasoning that the *κυκεών* and *κέρνος* were not part of the cult that was practiced on the middle terrace. From their catechetical instruction the saints in Corinth had learned not to fear idols nor the so-called deities behind them. These entities had lost their reality. Thus the more sophisticated members of the congregation seem to have operated with a broad interpretation of the circumstances in which they thought they could eat idol-food. (CC)

*Knowledge puffs up.* It fills one with false pride. (CSB)

Only the person who holds it benefits. (TLSB)

In the face of this complacent attitude, Paul begins his pastoral response with this general truth: "knowledge puffs up" (8:1). The possession of a superior degree of religious knowledge did not guarantee that those who had it would take the right attitude toward the issue of idol-meat. For the acquisition of expertise—be it religious, philosophical, or whatever—tends to inflate a person

with a sense of superiority over others. This boasting in self, then, rather than in the Lord (cf. 1:31) puts him at odds with the Lord's purposes for his church. The Lord wants his church to be built up as a community, and that can only happen when its members display unselfish love for one another (cf. 10:23). This "love" is *not* "puffed up" (13:4). Such love will be patterned on "the example of Christ, who died for the weak ([8:]11), and also the example of Paul, who is willing to renounce all meat in order to keep his brothers and sisters from stumbling ([8:]13)." (CC)

This is evidently the second problem at Corinth concerning which they had written to Paul. Look at 7:1. "Now about" introduces what Paul had taught them. The words "all of us have knowledge" are put in quotation marks by RSV, TEV, and JB because the translators think that Paul is quoting from their letter. (Buls)

Grosheide: Knowledge in Paul's vocabulary is not something purely intellectual, it is a knowledge which has results and leads to action, especially religious action. . . . The Corinthians were convinced that they understood the problem except for a few minor details. (Buls)

But they were trying to determine everything by means of their intellect only. But Paul adds: "Knowledge puffs us." This is an axiom. Always mere intellectual knowledge leads to proud domination. When people compare themselves with others without loving them pride results. Look at 1 Corinthians 13:2. Paul adds: "But love builds up." Here look at 1 Corinthians 13:8. Love for the neighbor must always be the starting point. (Buls)

Morris: Pride so often accompanies knowledge, but it is the very antithesis of the genuine Christian spirit. (Buls)

Kretzmann: Many of the Corinthian Christians pretended to be so firmly grounded in head knowledge that they rose superior to all prejudices . . . Such an attitude is vain and sinful if it is not attended by the proper fruit of love in good works. (Buls)

Knowledge is necessary and good in itself but more than knowledge is needed. (Buls)

Paul immediately gets to the heart of the matter. Many of the Corinthians were all too conscious of their own knowledge as Christians, especially as it might pertain to the eating of idol meats. The Corinthians' knowledge had become the focus of attention, the beginning and end of the matter. Their knowledge was not turned outward in love, but inward in self-awareness and conceit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

Phusioi – Paul used this verb to describe the arrogant, self-important Christians in Corinth who were dividing the church into factions and were ignoring the apostle's directives, even condoning the incestuous man (4:6, 18-19; 5:2). Paul probably has in mind Ha 2:4, which contrasts the unrighteous person as "puffed up" with the righteous person, who lives by faith. (CC)

*love builds up.* Explained in vv. 7–13. The Christian should love his brother who doubts. (CSB)

Love guides relationships between Christians (cf ch 13), promoting mutual care. (TLSB)

Knowledge is good, but knowledge as an end in itself serves no good purpose. Love must be added to knowledge so that it may be utilized rightly. Love edifies the church; it builds up, not

in a hollow but in a substantive way. Love puts knowledge to its proper use – namely, to serve and help the neighbor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

**8:2** *one imagines that he knows something* – Those who are wise and knowledgeable in their own eyes demonstrate, in fact, that they know very little. A Christian who is truly wise and knowledgeable will recognize that one’s knowledge is very limited. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

The arrogant person (8:2), who is satisfied in his possession of a certain level of Christian knowledge, has not yet really comprehended the spirit of the Christian faith. This is evident in Hab 2:4, which contrasts the righteous person, who lives by faith, with the “puffed up” person, who presumes that his accomplishments and virtues have elevated his status before God. His thinking is according to Law, not the Gospel of undeserved grace. His understanding is still thoroughly self-centered (cf. Gal 6:3). He does not want to remain a listener and a learner but acts like a person who has arrived. He no longer looks forward as eagerly as the Christian should to heaven, when he will finally see “face to face” and know as he has been known (1 Cor 13:12). (CC)

Paul is here using "know" in the Scriptural sense. Compare Matthew 7:23 and John 10:14. It is a knowledge with affection and which is entirely for the other person. It has nothing to do with selfish "liking." It denotes a lasting love, the true love of God which comes to us in the Gospel. Paul is here speaking about the person who is deceiving himself. "He has not yet come to know just as he ought to know." (Buls)

Morris: Knowledge is proud that it has learnt so much. Wisdom is humble that it knows no more. (Buls)

A similar thought is found at Galatians 6:3. Paul is speaking about the proud self-deceiver whose knowledge lacks the most important ingredient. (Buls)

Psalm 111:10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.”

Romans 11:33-36 “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

*does not yet know.* The wisest and most knowledgeable Christian realizes that his knowledge is limited. God is the only one who knows all (cf. Ro 11:33–36). (CSB)

*ought to know* – Knowledge that does not result in love is self-delusional and false. (TLSB)

**8:3** *he is known by God.* A person who tempers his knowledge with love toward God shows that he is really known and thus accepted by God as one of God’s own redeemed (Gal 4:8–9; 1Jn 4:7–8). (CSB)

Recognized and received by the Lord. Cf 13:12. (TLSB)

In contrast to the person who thinks he knows something, Paul sets the one who loves God (8:3). The logic of 8:3 is from evidence to inference. If someone loves God, it is because that person is known by God; God is the source of that person's love. Paul says something similar in Gal 4:9: "Now knowing God—or rather being known by God ..." God's knowledge and election of a person come first and enable a person to then know and love God. While a person may think that he has learned about God and has chosen to believe in and love God, it actually was God's prior action of knowing him and revealing himself that results in the person knowing and loving God. (CC)

Such a person has been freed from self-centered pride in himself and what he knows. He no longer lives for himself, but for God, who has granted him salvation in Christ. And in loving God, he will begin to love and build up God's people. When a person's focus is thus on God and others, he will no longer rejoice in his own knowledge but in God's gracious knowledge of him (cf. 1 Cor 13:12; Gal 4:9). His life will be characterized by humble gratitude (cf. 1 Cor 4:7). (CC)

We would have expected Paul to say: "But if anyone loves God, this one has knowledge." But love does not start with a person. It begins and is constantly coming from God. "This one is known by Him." (Buls)

Franzmann: Real 'knowledge' is not an attainment of man but God's gift to man, not so much a knowing as a being known, that is, being loved, chosen, and called by God. (Buls)

Look at 2 Timothy 2:19; Galatians 4:9; Romans 8:28-29. (Buls)

Grosheide: The real difference is ultimately one of one's relationship to God . . . It is Paul's purpose to inform the Corinthians of the great significance of God's love which surpasses all earthly knowledge. (Buls)

Kretzmann: If the faith of a Christian has found its proper expression in love toward his neighbor, 1 John 5:2, then he also knows that his knowledge of love is the result of God's having known him. If God knows any one in this way, it is an effective knowledge, Galatians 4:9; Romans 8:29; it brings him into the most intimate relation of mind and spirit. (Buls)

egnostai is a perfect indicative passive: "has come to be known and is still known" by God. Therefore, God's knowing a person is the cause for the person's loving, and not the other way around. Those who love God demonstrate that they have first been known and saved by God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

**8:4** 1 Cor 8:1–3 laid the foundation for Paul's response to the question about idol-food. "Knowledge" and "love" (8:1) are the key terms. On the one hand, Paul concedes: "Yes, you and I know about idol-foods. We know that they are just food." On the other hand, Paul reminds the Corinthians that a self-centered knowledge without love has no value and does not build up the church (13:2). God's loving choice rests on the person who loves him and loves his neighbor. (CC)

*we know* – Both the apostle and those who eat idol food in Corinth share a basic knowledge about God and about idolatry. (TLSB)

*an idol has no real existence.* It represents no real god and possesses no power (see Ps 115:4–7; 135:15–17; Isa 44:12–20). But there are demons behind them (10:20). (CSB)

There is only one God; all other “so-called gods” (v 5) are mere human creations. Cf Romans 1:22-23. Some Corinthians took this “knowledge” and decided that they could eat any food that had been sacrificed to the idols because the idols were not real. (TLSB)

What implications, then, must be drawn regarding the eating of idol-food? On the face of it, from the standpoint of Christian *knowledge* there should not be a problem. Again Paul concedes that the Corinthians’ slogans are true: “there is no idol in the world” and “there is no God but one” (8:4). After all, the first slogan was thoroughly consistent with the prophets and psalmists who mocked the lifeless idols of the heathen (e.g., Ps 115:3–8; Is 44:9–20). And the second slogan echoed Israel’s foundational creed, the *Shema*’ of Deut 6:4: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!” This creed was recited by the faithful Israelite every morning and afternoon. It also formed a key element in synagogue worship. It was, above all, this clear monotheistic affirmation that distinguished the Jewish people from the polytheistic cultures surrounding them. Paul here agrees with the testimony of the “wise” in Corinth to the continuity between Israel’s ancient faith in the one true God and the monotheistic position of Christianity. (CC)

In verses 4-6 Paul speaks of knowledge of idols and knowledge of God. "So then," takes us back to verse 1. Note the similarity of words. Paul again says "about." Many are of the opinion that also in this verse Paul is quoting from the Corinthians' letter. RSV indicates that idea: "We know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one.'" (Buls)

There is only on true God. All pagan gods and idols are non-existent. "World" is used in the sense of the ungodly world. The latter part of this verse reminds us of Deuteronomy 6:4. (Buls)

Morris: Paul is prepared to agree with his correspondents that the gods the heathen worship are no gods. (Buls)

Kretzmann: All the strange gods which were described in the hymns of the day were not realities, but were nothing. (Buls)

Grosheide: There is no reason to abstain from sacrificial meat for there is but one God, our God whom we adore. (Buls)

Part of the knowledge the Corinthians had was that idols represent no real gods and have no real power. Thus sacrifices offered to idols are offered to nothing, and the meat is not defiled. However, Paul’s comments here should be taken along with his later comments that there are demonic forces behind the worship of idols. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

**8:5** *so-called gods*. The alleged gods of Greek and Roman mythology. (CSB)

Paul continues to express his agreement with what the Corinthians had learned as part of their basic Christian knowledge. Israel’s faith as expressed in the *Shema*’ governed its attitude to the various gods and goddesses worshiped by neighboring peoples. Although Paul and the Corinthians knew that there were many of these—some with their primary abode in heaven, the usual dwelling place of the gods, others with their residence on earth—they were agreed that they were all merely “so-called ‘gods’ ” (8:5); they had no real existence and no real power. (CC)

“Yes,” Paul continues, “I acknowledge that there are many of these so-called ‘gods’ and ‘lords.’ ” The term “lords” may include both the “lords” worshiped in the mystery cults and departed

emperors who were worshiped as “lord and god.” But the title was also given to the regular gods and goddesses like Isis and Serapis. (CC)

*many “gods” and many “lords.”* Not that there actually are many gods and lords. This would contradict the consistent and emphatic teaching of Scripture that there is but one God (Dt 6:4). Paul is recognizing the obvious fact that there are many who are worshiped as gods—though they do not actually exist, to say nothing of being deities. (CSB)

But no matter how dazzling was the array of so-called “gods” and “lords” offering themselves for allegiance, as far as Paul and the Corinthians are concerned (“for us”) there is only “one God, the Father” (8:6; cf. “one Father ... one God,” Mal 2:10). This one God is no local deity with a circumscribed residence either in heaven or on earth. Rather, he is the almighty Creator and source of “all things” (1 Cor 8:6; cf. Gen 14:19, 22; Jonah 1:9). He is also “the Father” of the “one Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 8:6) and of those who believe in Jesus. Christians live for their heavenly Father (“and we [are] *for* him,” 8:6). In everything they are oriented toward him and strive to please him. (CC)

"For even if" is used to elucidate verse 4. Some are of the opinion that Paul is again quoting snatches from the Corinthians' letter. "For even if" is "although" and is concessive. Note the repetition of "many" in the second part of verse 5. Paul is probably not making a distinction between "gods" and "worlds." He is simply using the high-sounding vocabulary of the heathen but it amounts to absolutely nothing. JB makes verse 5 a contrary-to-fact condition to bring out the point that these so-called gods and lords are non-existent. The heathen had images on earth for their imagined gods which filled heaven and earth but it all amounted to nothing. (Buls)

Thus far the vain imaginings of the pagans. Verse 6 begins with "yet" a strong adversative conjunction. "For us" means "for us Christians." (Buls)

Note that the 26th edition of Nestle Greek text prints verse 6 as a liturgical formula. Perhaps it was a formula used in their divine services. This theory is not harmful so long as it is not used in the interest of form criticism or its equivalent. Note how lines 1-2 correspond to lines 3-4. Lines 1 and 3 speak about the Father and the Son. Lines 2 and 4 speak about their activities and what they mean for Christians. (Buls)

**8:6** *one Lord* – This common early Christian expression focused on the Father and the Son (cf Php 2:6-11). (TLSB)

The Christian also knows only “one Lord Jesus Christ” (8:6; cf. Eph 4:5; 1 Tim 2:5). Echoing the church’s confession, Paul makes bold to identify the “one Lord” of Israel’s *Shema*’ with the Lord Jesus. He senses no dissonance in attaching this affirmation to his declaration that there is only “one God,” for he clearly regards the Father and the Son as distinct persons within the one Godhead. The Son is the eternal Word of God, affirmed also in Jn 1:3 and Heb 1:2 to be the agent through whom the Father made the whole created order (1 Cor 8:6). The believer knows that it is through Christ that he has both his physical and his spiritual existence. (CC)

Note the prominence of "one God." There is only one. In apposition to this is "the Father." No other religion than the one true one calls God "Father," as Christians know Him, the Father of Jesus and the Father of all believers. (Buls)

The universe is "from Him." And we Christians are *to* Him, wholly devoted to Him, not to any idol or false god. (Buls)

Now the second line. Just as God is "one" so our Lord, Jesus Christ, is "one." No polytheism here. All things are "through" Him. He is the Creator. Look at Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11; Hebrews 1:3. In addition, He is our Savior and our Mediator. Ephesians 2:18; Romans 8:29. (Buls)

Lenski: One God and One Lord excludes all pagan notions about gods as such for the Christian consciousness. (Buls)

For the final phrase Morris notes 2 Corinthians 5:17. In four beautiful symmetrical lines Paul briefly describes the person and work of the One Father and the One Lord which work is devoted to mankind and therefore believers live entirely to this One God. It is no wonder that modern scholars consider these lines to be of a liturgical nature. But at the same time we believe that they were composed by Paul himself. (Buls)

*from whom all things came ... through whom we exist.* See Heb 2:10. God the Father is the ultimate source of all creation (Ac 4:24). God the Son is the dynamic one through whom, with the Father, all things came into existence (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16). (CSB)

The Son was active in the creation of life and in the new creation of faith (2Co 5:17). (TLSB)

The classic way of stating our relation to the Trinity is this: Our life and salvation come to us from the Father through the Son in the Spirit (that is, in the Spirit-bestowed Word and sacraments), and we worship and live in the Spirit through the Son to the Father. The triune God is a dynamic reality; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – one God in three persons – are together our very life. The love of God flows out to us, embraces us, and draws us into himself. Living in him, we live in love for one another. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

**8:7** *not all possess this knowledge*<sup>7</sup>. Knows that an idol has no personal reality. (CSB)

True faith in the Christian confession will always be active in love (Gal 5:6). Paul has established that he is at one with the more "enlightened" members of the church in the confidence and *knowledge* that idols represent gods that really do not exist, and the foods offered to them are just ordinary foods (8:4–6). But knowledge of the essentials of the faith merely puffs up if it is not applied in *Christian love*. And Paul's loving pastoral concern for the whole congregation has made him aware that some of the Corinthians are not yet free from the emotional pull of their former attachment to idols. As soon as they give in to pressure from friends and join them for a meal in an idol's temple, the old associations begin to reassert themselves. They find they are not able to regard the meat simply as a gift from the Creator. The meat has been offered to idols. So their conscience is defiled; they eat and go home feeling guilty because they have participated, at least outwardly, in a ritual of worship of a false god (cf. Rom 14:23). (CC)

"But" is a strong "however." Paul is about to set them straight as to what is causing the trouble. "Not in all" means that some had not the knowledge necessary. The article "this" points us back to the knowledge of verse 1. The cause is brought out in the remainder of this verse. A minority need their help. AAT translates: "But not everybody knows this. Some are still so used to an idol they think of the meat they eat as sacrificed to the idol." Though they know that the idol is nothing, they still cling to the notion that the meat is sacrificed to something that is real.



They were confused. And so, because their conscience is weak, it is defiled. They were not convinced that eating this meat was a matter of indifference. (Buls)

Kretzmann: Some of them could not get rid of the notion that there was something real about the idol . . . The idea that the idol was, after all, a real being gave them a bad conscience, and for that reason their eating, though in itself not wrong, became sinful. (Buls)

Grosheide: When he eats such meat it still is sacrificial meat to him and puts him in touch with the idols. (Buls)

Lenski: Their Christian knowledge regarding idols does not rid them of the consciousness that what they thus eat is sacrificial idol-meat . . . A weak conscience is one that is not fully clear as to whether an act is right or wrong. (Buls)

Many Corinthians were adult converts who would have previously taken part in pagan idol worship. Viewing idols as real, with distinctive powers, they think of the meat which was sacrificed as being somehow “unholy.” Thus, when they eat of it, their weak conscience is defiled. They think of themselves as having been made impure; or they are burdened with guilt because they think they are sinning against God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

*their conscience being weak, is defiled.* Christians who conceive of an idol as being real cannot rid themselves of this idea. Consequently, they think that in eating meat sacrificed on pagan altars they have involved themselves in pagan worship and thus have sinned against Christ. (CSB)

Because their moral outlook is not yet firmly grounded in a Christian perspective, they have a “weak” perspective on idols; they recall worshiping these very gods. When they see someone eating idol sacrifices, they think such people are worshiping the idol to whom it was sacrificed. (TLSB)

Preserving a good conscience is part of a Christian’s high responsibility. Paul testified before the Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities that he had always maintained a good conscience before God and other people (Acts 23:1; 24:16). He wrote to Timothy: “The aim of our charge is love that springs from a clean heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5; cf. 1 Tim 1:19; 3:9; Titus 1:15). Not only should each Christian strive to live before God and his neighbor with a good conscience, but he should also try to keep others in the congregation from the burden of a stained conscience. This is part of what it means to live as sanctified people (1 Cor 1:2). (CC)

*is defiled* – They were led to sin because they think they are worshiping an idol. (TLSB)

The Corinthian situation may be compared with the mission field, where new converts often find it difficult to rid themselves entirely of their old fears of witchcraft and ancestral spirits. In countries like Papua New Guinea, the earliest converts often resisted suggestions from missionaries that they use traditional musical instruments like the kundu drum in their worship services. They explained that they could not hear these instruments without hearing the voice of the spirits. Later generations of Christians who never participated in the pagan practices were able to incorporate the drum in worship. (CC)

**8:8** *not commend us* – Paristami means “to present to someone for acceptance; to give as an offering, dedicate.” Food does not commend us to God. The eating of various foods, including

those offered to idols, falls in the area of Christian freedom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

Many commentators think 8:8a(“food will not present us to God”) is another quotation from the Corinthians’ prior letter to Paul. By this slogan some Christians justified their attendance at meals in the heathen temples. What we eat or drink, they contended, was not something God took into account in deciding who should be ushered into his presence. (CC)

Whether the words are a quotation or not, they were in accord with Paul’s position. He taught that “the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). His attitude to rules about food and drink was similar to his stance on circumcision: for those in Christ Jesus it had become a matter of no importance. What really counted was “faith active in love” (Gal 5:6; cf. 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 6:15). (CC)

Matthew 15:11 “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’”

*no worse...no better* – It is not necessarily wrong to eat the food sacrificed to idols, but eating it is not beneficial because it leads away from God and harms the neighbor. “The Gospel does not advise about distinguishing clothing and meats and giving up of property” (Ap. XXVII 26). (TLSB)

"But" introduces Paul's exposition of the matter. "Food" covers all foods. Grosheide thinks that again Paul is quoting from the Corinthians' letter. None of our versions indicate that. Likely Paul is *not* quoting their letter. "No worse -- no better" are correlative adverbs of negation. Each is followed by a present general condition which holds true at all times. It is the axiomatic condition. If we *don't* eat we are not worse off. If we *do* eat we are not better off. Apparently, Paul is criticizing both groups. The minority felt that eating meat sacrificed to idols was sinful. The majority felt that eating such meat showed their strength of faith. Both were wrong. (Buls)

Kretzmann: The food that we eat cannot influence our spiritual life . . . These external matters do not affect our standing with God. (Buls)

Grosheide: If food does not bring us nearer to God, it is of no importance for our relation to God whether we eat or not. (Buls)

Lenski: Paul's exposition . . . has a double purpose in mind: first, to assist those having a weak conscience who eat idol-meat only with compunction; secondly, to correct those having a strong conscience who eat without compunction and who are proud of doing so. Food has no power to determin our relation to God one way or another. (Buls)

The *Apology* states concerning this verse:

It is false that monastic observances are the works of the counsels of the Gospel. For the Gospel does not counsel distinctions among clothes or foods, not the surrender of property. These are human traditions, about all of which it has been said in 1 Corinthians 8:8 'Food does not commend us to God.' (Buls)

**8:9** *this right of yours*. To eat meat sacrificed to idols because you know that an idol is nothing (v. 4). (CSB)

The conclusion of the “strong” is correct: there is no other god, so what is sacrificed to an idol is nothing (cf 10:19, 26). (TLSB)

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (LW 31:344) Though these two statements seem to be contradictory, they are in fact a scriptural depiction of one who is in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

“We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise, he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. (LW 31:371) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

1 Corinthians 9:19 “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”

Romans 13:8 “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”

*the weak.* Those Christians whose consciences are weak, who think it is wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols. (CSB)

So if a Christian felt he must refrain from idol-food, Paul assured him he was at no disadvantage; he was not missing out on anything. By the same token, the Christian who participated in these meals should not think he was in any way superior. (CC)

The guiding principle is to be Christian love, which “builds up.” Knowledge on the other hand, can puff up those who think they possess it (8:1). The apostle warns the Corinthians not to let their authority (ἐξουσία, 8:9) as liberated Christian people go to their heads (cf. the slogan “all things are permissible” in 6:12; 10:23). They had become “puffed up” (4:19; 5:2) and arrogant in their newfound knowledge, as if in their sovereign freedom they could do anything they pleased. Paul wryly remarks that they had better watch that “this authority of yours doesn’t become a stumbling block to the weak” (8:9), leading them into grave spiritual danger (8:10–13). True spiritual knowledge should always result in love for the Christian brother (Gal 5:13), especially the weak. (CC)

How often does not Scripture say "Beware!" This is a stern warning. "This right of yours might become a cause of sin for the weak." How terrible! AAT translates: "But be careful, or weak Christians may fall into sin because you do as you please." (Buls)

Paul does not say that it will be so in every case. He guards himself with "perhaps." But the danger is there. (Buls)

Lenski: Not our 'knowledge' but our 'love' for the weak must govern our action. (Buls)

Kretzmann: Paul rebukes the attitude of the stronger Christians with a very serious reference to the consequences of their uncharitable behavior. This right ceased to be a matter of Christian liberty when indulging in it proved an obstacle to their weak brother. (Buls)

Grosheide: This right cannot be the rule for a person's conduct. The eating of sacrificial meat in itself is no sin, but it may lead to sin if the weaker brethren eat it in a certain way. Love for the brethren requires that we reckon with the difficulties of the weak, look at verses 11-13; Romans 14:13; Galatians 5:13. . . . Paul's arguments are valid for every kind of eating and the eating of sacrificial meat is only a specific case. (Buls)

Morris: The Corinthians claimed the 'right' to do as they pleased in the matter of idols. Paul reminds them that no Christian is at liberty to assert his 'rights' if that means doing harm to other people, a principle of wide application. 'Stumbling block' is a stone in the pathway, an obstacle, something that trips one up and makes progress difficult. The actions of the strong must not be such as to afford a hindrance to the progress of the weak. What is right for one man may well be wrong for another. No one should try to force his standards of right and wrong on to others, whose conscience reacts differently. (Buls)

Eating this food, even though it is morally defensible, may lead others to sin (v. 7). (TLSB)

**8:10** *eating in an idol's temple.* At the site of ancient Corinth, archaeologists have discovered two temples containing rooms apparently used for pagan feasts where meat offered to idols was eaten. To such feasts Christians may have been invited by pagan friends. (CSB)

A different situation from that in 10:14-22, where idol rituals were involved. Many Greco-Roman temples had what we would consider dining or banqueting facilities. Meals were commonly eaten there, particularly for business or social functions such as birthday or wedding celebrations. (TLSB)

Paul now spells out his specific concern. Although many pagan Greeks and Romans no longer ascribed any significance to the old myths and deities, they continued to frequent the temples for social reasons. Once they became Christians, it was easy to rationalize that, after all, no divinities really inhabited these temples, the idols on show there were merely wood and stone, and the sacrificial food was merely food, a part of God's creation. Thus (they would argue) they could continue to accept invitations to dine in these sanctuaries, even in the more overtly idolatrous context of the dining rooms of Demeter's sanctuary,<sup>11</sup> thereby avoiding a painful breach with friends from their pagan past. (CC)

Now we have an example. "You who have this knowledge" denotes one who has knowledge, who has Christian liberty, but who does not begin with love for the neighbor. Here Paul is using the form of "in a temple" very ironically. Evidently people often received invitations to have dinner in temples. Paul imagines a case in which the person with knowledge purposely eats there to assert his liberty and right. But when the weak person sees what this strong person is doing, he too goes there to eat but the result is horrible. He conscience is emboldened, in spite of itself and thus he sins. (Buls)

Morris: Evidently the strong among the Corinthians had spoken of the necessity of 'building up' the weak by encouraging them to do such actions. (Buls)

Kretzmann: The stronger brethren freely accepted invitations to banquets in the temples of heathen gods. They probably had the idea that this was the most effective way of persuading the weak of their foolish position. But what was a questionable edification and could result in only one thing, namely in harm to the weak . . . The latter would also accept such invitations, with the

result that their consciences would be defiled. The behavior of the strong was thus the very opposite of charitableness, it was selfish presumption. (Buls)

Knowledge is good and necessary. But if it is without true love we have demolition rather than edification. (Buls)

**8:11** Because the new believer is led to worship what had formerly been considered a real god, the person breaks the First Commandment and is in danger of losing faith. (TLSB)

your knowledge...*this weak brother ... is destroyed*. The weak Christian is influenced by the example of the stronger Christian and, though he feels it to be wrong, eats the meat that has been offered to an idol. The spiritual destruction that follows is explained in v. 12. (CSB)

While the self-confident Christian blithely goes ahead and parades his Christian “knowledge” and “freedom,” he seems to be either unaware or completely careless of the effect his behavior is having on his weaker brother. Placing the verb ἀπόλλυται (“is being destroyed”) first in 8:11 for emphasis, Paul brings it home to every Christian that in allowing himself to become puffed up with his knowledge, he has become *personally* responsible (the apostle’s pastoral use of the pronoun “you” in 8:10, and the possessive adjective “your” in “your knowledge” in 8:11) for jeopardizing his brother’s salvation. This brother is being ruined spiritually (8:11; cf. 1:18; 10:9–10; 15:18). Four times in the last three verses of the chapter Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that the weak Christian is their brother. (CC)

Robertson and Plummer have pointed out that “the last clause [of 8:11] could hardly be more forcible in its appeal; every word tells; ‘the brother,’ not a mere stranger; ‘for the sake of whom,’ precisely to rescue him from destruction; ‘Christ,’ no less than He; ‘died,’ no less than that.” Paul’s argument here, as throughout the final verses of the chapter, closely parallels his longer discourse on the relationship between Christians in Romans 14. There his concern is twofold: that the weak should not judge the strong, and the strong should not despise the weak. Here his pastoral rebuke is directed only at the arrogance of those who sin against the “weak” and thereby sin against Christ (8:12). Just as Paul lived “by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20), so according to his Gospel the Son of God had died for all, even the most fragile and despised. As Isaiah foretold about him: “A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not snuff out” (Is 42:3). (CC)

### **Pastoral Implications for Today**

At first sight, the issue of idol-foods may seem to have little relevance today, since the eating of meat sacrificed to an idol is no longer an issue in Western Christianity. However, the principle of brotherly love which Paul enunciates does have broad application: “If food causes my brother to fall, I will never eat meat to eternity, lest I cause my brother to fall” (1 Cor 8:13). It is never appropriate to flaunt one’s “Christian freedom” and thereby lead a vulnerable brother to do something against his conscience. To do so is to sin against Christ himself (8:12). In this connection, Paul may have remembered the Lord’s words to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?” (Acts 9:4). Paul said to the Galatians: “You received me like an angel of God, like Christ Jesus” (Gal 4:14). That is true of all Christians, not just apostles; to receive or aid a Christian is to serve Christ himself (Mt 25:35–40). (CC)

Therefore, Paul says, to sin against a weak brother is to sin against Christ himself (1 Cor 8:12). This will be true also regarding the Corinthians’ abuses of the Lord’s Supper. Because the body and blood of Christ are present with the bread and wine, the person who partakes unworthily sins

against the Lord's body and blood (11:27–32). Such sins bring God's judgment (11:29–30). This requires the church, especially the pastor, to exercise discretion in the practice of Holy Communion. (CC)

Moreover, while idol-meat has ceased to be an issue in the West, close parallels to the situation in Corinth may be found in countries newly opened up to Christianity, where the eating of food offered to ancestral spirits and the pouring of libations to invoke and appease them (not to mention other occult practices) are still live issues. And in the West, comparable situations often arise. Many western Christians have been tempted to associate with pagan cults or to dabble in the occult (séances, Ouija boards, palmistry, astrology). Many more have been led astray by the multifaceted demonic temptations of a secular culture, for example, by certain forms of music and entertainment, or participation in certain clubs and fraternal orders like the Masons. Especially pervasive is what has been aptly called “the idolatry of materialism.” In its broadest sense, idolatry includes every activity and thing in which people revel apart from God and his good gifts. As Luther said, “Idolatry does not consist merely of erecting an image and praying to it. It is primarily in the heart, which pursues other things and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils.” (CC)

The Christian faith, on the other hand, is opposed to all forms of idolatry and syncretism (cf. 1 Jn 5:20–21). Just as the OT prophets condemned Baal worship as incompatible with the biblical faith, so Paul would ask the Corinthians: “What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor 6:15–16 NKJV). Thus Christians may not enter into syncretistic associations with pagan cults. (CC)

Fee broadens our understanding of the pastoral implications of 1 Cor 8:7–13 today:

Those who have been involved in the rescue of drug addicts and prostitutes, e.g., or of people involved in various expressions of voodoo and spirit worship, have an existential understanding of this text that others can scarcely appreciate. Many such people must be forever removed from their former associations, including returning to their former haunts for evangelism [evangelizing others still trapped in those sins], because the grip of their former life is so tenacious. Paul took the power of the demonic seriously; hence his concern that a former idolater, by returning to his or her idolatries, will be destroyed—that is, he or she will return to former ways and be captured by them all the more, and thus eventually suffer eternal loss. (CC)

Paul's concern that the brother not be destroyed may be applied even more broadly in areas of Christian ethics. How many Christians from cultures lacking a tradition of moderate drinking or how many recovered alcoholics or alcoholics' children have not been gravely offended by the flaunting of alcohol common in some Christian circles? Incitement to a gambling fling, or to other activities over which some Christians have scruples, or for which they have a weakness, also falls under the apostle's condemnation. It is one thing to thumb one's nose at pharisaical Christians; it is quite another thing when one's “Christian freedom” becomes the occasion of another's spiritual ruin. (CC)

Paul impresses on the Corinthian Christians that their conduct in the temples is not a sign of superior knowledge, nor the mark of free people; it is simply sinful. The verb “to sin” is placed emphatically both near the beginning and at the end of the Greek of 1 Cor 8:12. Far from helping and strengthening those with weak consciences, their brothers are hitting them when they are down. The verb τύπτω (“to strike, beat”) in 8:12 is normally used in the NT for a physical blow

(e.g., Acts 23:2). But here Paul uses it of a blow to a person's spirit. "What requires the tenderest handling is brutally treated, so that its sensibility is numbed." (CC)

Verse 10 is a rhetorical question. Paul does not answer it. (Buls)

Lenski: Better than a formal answer is the terrific blow which Paul drives home. (Buls)

The sense of "is destroyed" is that he is perishing right now already. And it is because of "your superior knowledge." Though weak he is still called "brother." Christ loved the weak and died for him. The "superior" brother destroys him. (Buls)

Robertson-Plummer: The last clause could hardly be more forcible in its appeal; every word tells; 'the brother' not a mere stranger; 'for the sake of whom,' precisely to rescue him from destruction; 'Christ' no less than He; 'died' no less than that. (Buls)

Kretzmann: The very object of Christ's death in the case of the weaker brother is frustrated by such thoughtless behavior. (Buls)

Lenski: Two mighty obligations converge, the one toward the brother and the other toward Christ . . . Christ died to save your brother -- to this extent Christ loved him; by your selfish knowledge and proud power you help to destroy your brother -- that is the extent to which YOU love him. (Buls)

The verb *apollumi* in the middle voice means "to come to ruin, to be destroyed, to perish, to lose salvation." Many Christians in Paul's day would likely have been invited by their pagan friends to the temple banquets. Some believers with a weak conscience would feel compelled to go if other "stronger" Christians also were going or had gone previously. In this way they would be influenced to sin against their conscience and stumble in their faith. Thus the knowledge of which some of the Corinthian Christians were so proud would end up being the cause of sin and the destruction of a fellow believer. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

**8:12** *wounding their conscience when is weak.* Eating meat offered to idols when they feel it is wrong tends to blunt their consciences, so that doing what is wrong becomes much easier. The result may be moral tragedy. (CSB)

But Paul's question takes up the effect of this libertine attitude on the weaker brother. Far from being a support to the brother who still struggles with his conscience, far from building him up in the faith, "you" (8:12; the use of the second person is pointed; also "your," 8:11–12), by this public display of your rights and "Christian freedom," are only fortifying him to act against his conscience. To you, perhaps, the food is merely food, but to your brother it is still idol-food; he cannot rid his conscience of the thought that this food has been sacrificed to an idol. 1 Cor 8:10–13 is a stern condemnation of the loveless behavior of those who claimed to have superior knowledge. (CC)

*you sin against Christ.* Because Christ died for your brother (v. 11), even as he died for you. It is also a sin against Christ because it breaks the unity of the members of his body (the church). (CSB)

By nullifying Christ's saving work in the new believer, the strong destroy the person's faith and sin against Christ. (TLSB)

In sinning against the least of Jesus' brothers, a Christian is sinning against Christ himself (1 Cor 8:12). For even the least important members of the church are temples of the Holy Spirit (3:16–17; 6:19) and vital parts of the body of Christ. (CC)

In 1 Cor 8:13 Paul draws the conclusion to the first part of his argument concerning idol-meat. With a strong “therefore” (8:13), he informs the complacent Christians of the lengths to which he is prepared to go for the sake of his *brother*. If he became aware that something as peripheral to Christ's kingdom as food (βρῶμα, “food,” is placed forward for emphasis) was ruining his brother, he would become a vegetarian for eternity. Twice in 8:13 Paul calls the “weak” Christian “*my brother*.” Without question, his brother's eternal welfare is far more important than food. Paul's pastoral concern for the weak “reminds us of Jesus' care for the little ones.” (CC)

"In this way" means "by not loving the weak brother for whom Christ died." (Buls)

Grosheide: It is the sin of wounding the conscience of believers, for this conscience is thus driven in a direction where the weak brother would not have gone of his own and where he is not permitted to go. (Buls)

Kretzmann: So it is not only the weak brother that sins but the stronger Christian that tempted him sins as well. And his is the greater damnation.

Morris: They are 'in Christ,' and anything done against them is accordingly done against Him. (Buls)

**8:13** *therefore* – dioper is even stronger than “therefore,” more like “for this very reason.” To paraphrase Paul in this verse, So important is another's faith and spiritual life that I'll never eat meat again if that's what it takes to keep that person from falling. Paul's clear admonition, then, for the sake of weaker believers, is that the Corinthians should not eat food that is known to have been sacrificed to idols. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

"Therefore" draws a conclusion to the entire chapter. We have a fact condition which is assumed to be true. Paul begins with "food" and then switches to "flesh." (Buls)

Kretzmann: He will give up even other foods about which another may still be in doubt, not only the food offered to sacrifices. (Buls)

Lenski: We who are strong in knowledge must be equally strong in love. Knowledge alone is nothing, knowledge combined with love is everything. (Buls)

Arrogance smells. Love edifies. A fitting observation by Morris in conclusion: (Buls)

Morris: The principle laid down in this chapter is one of great practical importance. It is always easy for the strong Christian to see no harm whatever in actions which would be sin if performed by the weak. (Buls)

*I will never eat meat again.* Paul will forever refrain from engaging in the harmless practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols if it will cause his weak Christian brother, who feels it is wrong, also to eat that meat. (CSB)



What might lead another to sin and unbelief is avoided in that person's presence. Paul took a different attitude toward those who demanded certain practices as a basis of righteousness (cf Gal 3:10). (TLSB)

**Ch 8** The rights and the freedom of the Gospel are wrongly promoted in the Corinthian Church, leading the believers to adopt too easily the behaviors and practices of the surrounding culture. No believer has the right or freedom to destroy the faith of others, especially those whom Paul describes as weak in the faith. Faith is not a private matter. Faithful Christians will be zealous to pray for and carry out God's will that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tm 2:3–4). How marvelously our Savior bears with our weaknesses! Most important, He took away our sin and builds us up in love. • From selfishly seeking our own rights at the expense of others, deliver us, O Lord. From unwittingly leading Your chosen saints into sin, deliver us, O Lord. Stir us up to worship and honor You alone, and through Your Spirit use us to turn others to You. Amen. (TLSB)