



151st Church of Christ
Small Group Study Guide – 1 CORINTHIANS
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AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
CLASS – Lesson 13

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 7:1-11:16, Questions asked about marriage, idols & head coverings

OUTLINE: Lesson 13

1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Liberty & Conscience

- 8:1-3 Knowledge and love
- 8:4-6 The truth about gods and God
- 8:7-8 Point conceded: Idols are nothing and food is neutral
- 8:9-13 But: Freedom that destroys vs. love that builds up

Having dealt with a few of the problems that had been reported to him, Paul turned at the beginning of chapter 7 to topics requested by the Corinthians in a letter to him. The first question was about marriage and celibacy (chap. 7), and the second concerned foods offered to idols. At first glance Paul seems to start addressing this second question before getting off track and then returning to the topic late in chapter 10. In fact, once introduced, Paul never leaves the topic. He just doesn't approach it the way his readers expected.

Paul begins by laying significant groundwork prior to giving a straight answer to their question later in the letter. Realizing that the context of chapters 8 & 9 is foundational rather than providing a simple answer to a question is essential for our understanding of what really concerned Paul. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, Paul does not give one answer about eating foods in chapter 8, only to contradict that answer in chapter 10. The discussion of 1 Cor 8:1-10:13 is not only of greater importance than the simple matter of eating certain foods, it is central to the entire troubled atmosphere in the Corinthian church.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Liberty & Conscience

The Corinthians, or some of them, wanted to know if they could eat foods offered to idols whether in the pagan temples or purchased in the market to be eaten in private homes. Paul used this question as an opportunity to discuss something much more important and of wider application. He seems to agree with those who maintained that since idols were just statues, foods offered to those idols would not be defiled in any spiritual way. But Paul is more concerned with why they would want to eat these foods when they knew that to do so would cause great distress, and possibly needless temptations, for some of their brethren.

- 1. What does Paul teach in verses 1-3 about Christians eating things offered to idols?**

- 2. What are the benefits of knowledge and what are the dangers of it?**

- 3. What has Paul written previously in 1 Corinthians about being puffed up?**

- 4. On what topic was it claimed that “we all have knowledge” and did Paul fully agree that all the Corinthian Christians shared this knowledge?**

- 5. What fundamental Christian doctrine is summarized in vv. 4-6? Do you agree or not (and why) that as a general rule all Christians endorse the doctrine of monotheism? What qualifiers or limits would you or Paul place on the idea that all Christians know this as demonstrated in the Corinthian situation?**

- 6. Itemize the facts about God and Christ that Paul presents in verse 6.**

- 7. On the basic idea of eating things offered to idols, who was right and who was wrong in the Corinthian congregation: those who ate such things or those who did not? Limit your answer – for now – to the information Paul gives in this chapter. Which group do you think was more bothered by Paul’s position, particularly in verse 8? Why?**

- 8. In what ways do pagan gods (idols) really exist and assert power?**

- 9. Does a food, eaten for physical nourishment, have any positive or negative spiritual value? Is there a spiritual advantage in eating or not eating a particular food, including foods offered to idols? If so, what is the source of that spiritual meaning or impact?**
- 10. Can a Christian be a vegan or vegetarian? Should a Christian be a vegan or vegetarian? Should Christian vegans make such dietary restrictions a test of Christian fellowship?**
- 11. Thinking of the physical logistics involved, how could the weak brother in verse 10 have personally seen the “liberated” brother eating (lit., “reclining at table”) in a temple, and how would the sight have encouraged (ESV: emboldened) the weak brother to join in and do the same? NOTE: “Encouraged” or “emboldened” is the same Greek word as “edify” or “build up” in 8:1.**
- 12. Is there more involved in “perishing” (v. 11) and “stumbling” (vv. 9 & 13) than disagreeing with or being offended by the “eating” brother’s behavior?**
- 13. What is the only reason given in this chapter for avoiding temple meals? What does this suggest about Paul’s primary concern not only at this point, but indeed throughout the letter (cf. 1 Cor 12)? How does this section (vv. 9-13) relate to the statement of verse 1 that knowledge puffs up, but love edifies?**
- 14. Having looked at the whole chapter, let’s summarize by returning to verse 1. In verse 1, Paul makes three direct statements. What three subjects does he mention? Which one do you think, based on the rest of the chapter, was more important to Paul?**