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Let Love Control Knowledge

8: 1-6

Let love control knowledge DIG: Why did some of the Corinthians need to let love control their knowledge? What “knowledge” did the Corinthians think they had? What was the result of the “knowledge?” Although Paul did not dispute that “knowledge,” what does he mean by contrasting it with love? What caused Paul to be so intolerant of idols?

REFLECT: Have you ever been accused by a nonbeliever of doing something that a “believer is not supposed to do?” If so, how did you handle the situation? What did you learn from it? What parallels can you draw between the “eating meat offered to idols” controversy in Corinth and your own life? Are there any ethical issues that might be considered gray areas?

Love and knowledge must go together.



Smoking or eating big macs were not matters of concern in the **Corinthian** church. They faced other pressing issues. Namely, as **they** asked **Paul** “**Are we free to eat meat sacrificed to idols?**” This would be no big deal to us. After all, I can’t remember the last time I was tempted to eat an Idol Burger. But make no mistake about it - this issue not only threatened to divide the church in **Corinth** even further (if that were possible), but it placed at risk the fragile faith of many in **that city** who were saved out of a background steeped in **idol** worship. So, they asked **Paul** about it. **His** answer, while being rather lengthy (**to see**

[link click Bj - Concerning Our Liberty in Messiah](#)), lays out for us a number of practical principles that will help us to navigate our lives around the gray areas that we face each and every day.

While this dispute might seem silly to us, it was anything but silly to a young, struggling church trying to survive in a culture of **paganism** and polytheism. We get a glimpse of what life was like in downtown **Corinth** by **Luke's** cryptic description of **Athens** as a **city full of idols (Acts 17:16)**. As **Athens** was . . . so was **Corinth**. Statues of **false gods** lined the streets. Temples to those **idols** filled the back alleys. Many, if not most, of the members of the church at **Corinth** were saved out of a background of **idol** worship. They were troubled by vivid memories of times spent in those temples, worshiping at the feet of **pagan gods**.²¹⁴

We know that we all have knowledge (8:1-3): Now about food sacrificed to idols. **Paul** begins this section with “**Now about,**” a phrase that was part of **Paul's** typical response to the letter that **the Corinthians** had sent **him** asking for **his advice** on certain issues. **Now about food sacrificed to idols (8:1a)**. The word **sacrificed to idols** (Greek: *eidolothytos*) appears to have been a Greek word coined by believers in the first century precisely because of the concern over the issue of how to handle food that had been **sacrificed to idols**. In a society filled with **idols** and **pagan** temples, what should a believer do?

We know that, as you say, “We all have knowledge” (8:1b). As with **his**, “**Now about**” comment above, so here also **he** appears to begin with a quotation from the letter written to **him**. It seems that **some** in **Corinth** were justifying **their** behavior by claiming certain **knowledge**, presumably **the knowledge** that **idols**, in fact, were only made with human hands and did not really represent any true reality.²¹⁵ While **Paul** concedes that point, **he** also points out that such **knowledge** can easily lead to pride and arrogance. **Yes, that is so, but “knowledge” puffs a person up with pride; whereas love builds up (8:1c)**. What is far more important than **knowledge** is **love**, especially the issue of whether this **love** is being used to build other believers up. In other words, our **love** must control our **knowledge**.

A know-it-all attitude is only evidence of arrogance. The person who really knows the truth is only too conscious of how much he does not know. Furthermore, it is one thing to know *doctrine*, and quite another to know **God**. It is possible to grow in Bible **knowledge** but not grow in grace or in one's personal relationship with **God**. The test is **love**. **Love** and **knowledge** must go together: **speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15)**. It has been well said, “**Knowledge** without **love** is brutality, and **love** without **knowledge** is hypocrisy.”²¹⁶

Without actually saying so, **Paul** raises doubts about **their** possession of **knowledge**. Because the acquisition of **knowledge** about spiritual things should ultimately lead to the benefit of other believers, **Paul** questioned whether **the Corinthians** really did have **the knowledge they claimed**. **The person who thinks he “knows” something doesn’t yet know in the way he ought to know (8:2)**. True **knowledge** is not merely Bible trivia, but in living in a way that pleases **ADONAI**. If our **knowledge** doesn’t affect the way we live it is useless to us.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** great **love**. Praise **You** that **Your** **love** is not mere words, but **You** have shown **Your** great **love** by actions - by **Your** willingness to **offer Yourself** as **the sin offering** of the world (**Second Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 2:8**) suffering pain and **shame (Hebrews 12:2)**. It is wonderful that **You** made the requirement to enter heaven to not be money or **knowledge** - but our **faith (Romans 5:2)** which comes from **love**.*

***You** are so wise in making **love** to be **the greatest commandment** and **love** for others as **the second greatest commandment**. And He said to him: **You shall love ADONAI your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.** This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** The entire Torah and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (**Mt 22:37-40**). It is easy to **love You** dear **Father**, for **You** are so wonderful, but sometimes it is hard to **love** others. May **You** help us remember that showing **love** to you includes showing **love** for others, not in mere words, but in actions (**1 John 3:10 and 18**). Thank **You** for **Your** wonderful example of **love**! In **Yeshua’s** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

However, if someone loves God, God knows him (8:3). **Paul** stresses that if anyone truly **loves God**, which inevitably also involves **loving** others (**Matthew 22:37-40; First John 4:11 and 19-21**), then that person is **known by God**. Such divine **knowledge** is a euphemism for **God’s** election and salvation of that person: **The Lord knows His own (Second Timothy 2:19b)**. What an incredible privilege to be **known** and **loved** by **ADONAI**.²¹⁷ After these introductory remarks, **Paul** brings up the specific subject at hand.

We know that an idol is nothing (8:4-6): So then, **Paul** begins a new topic and follows this introductory phrase with **we “know,”** which once again suggests that the next phrase is a quotation from **the Corinthian** letter to **him**. **As for eating food sacrificed to idols, we “know” that, as you say, “An idol has no real existence in the world, and there is only one God” (8:4)**. This phrase seems to be the basis on which some of **the Corinthians**

were **eating food sacrificed to idols**, namely, that **so-called “gods”** simply do not **exist** because **there is only one God**.

Paul agrees with **them** up to a point. **For even if there are so-called “gods,” either in heaven or on earth - as in fact there are “gods” and “lords” galore - (8:5)**. **Paul** knows that the world is full of **“gods”** and **“lords”** that are real rivals to **the one true God** and **he** will not dismiss **them** so lightly. Yes, **an idol itself** is only a man-made object. But behind **it** lies a spiritual being who rivals **YHVH . . . a demon**. What **the Corinthians** have not taken seriously is that **pagan** temples are the home of **demonic** activity and fellowshiping where **they** live is to fellowship with **them!** Later in **his** letter **Paul** will declare: **So, what am I saying? That food sacrificed to idols has any significance in itself? No, what I am saying is that the things which pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice not to God but to demons (10:19-20a)**.

And I don’t want to become sharers with demons (10:20b). **Paul** didn’t have much tolerance for **idols**. **His** attitude came from **his** Jewish background, for after **the exile in Babylon** (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)), **God’s people** lost all attraction to **idols**. The message of prophets like **Isaiah** regarding the dangers of spiritual **idolatry** had finally sunk in (see the commentary on [Isaiah Hy - Worship the LORD, Not Idols](#)). **Paul** was deeply disturbed by all **the idols he saw in Athens** (see the commentary on [Acts Cb - An Unknown God in Athens](#)). **He** praised the **Thessalonian** believers for **turning to God from idols (1 Thess 1:9)**. And notice how often **Paul** includes **idolatry** in a list of serious sins (**1 Cor 5:11** and **5:9; Gal 5:20; Col 3:5**). **Paul** had no intention of letting those arrogant **Corinthians**, with **their “sophisticated knowledge,”** engage in anything that **he** considered sinful, dangerous, or **demonic**.

Before **Paul** gets into “the meat” of **his** argument (see [Bm - The Weaker Brother or Sister](#)), **he** cites an expanded version of what might be called the Believers Sh’ma: **Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we exist. And one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, through whom were created all things and through whom we have our being (8:6)**. **Paul** uses this confession as the foundation of **his** argument against **the Corinthians’** behavior. Associating with the many other false **“gods”** and **“lords,”** ruptures the relationship with **the one true God and Lord** (see [Bt - Run From Idolatry](#)). It bars *any* participation in **idolatry**, even if it appears harmless on the surface of things, like friends gathering for a pleasant meal in an **idol’s** temple.²¹⁸