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The Weaker Brother or Sister

8: 7-13

The weaker brother or sister DIG: What did Paul mean by “the knowledge-driven believer,” and “the weak brother?” For what purpose should “the knowledge-driven believer,” defer to “the weak brother?” Who should take responsibility for conflicts between the two?

REFLECT: What freedoms do you feel you have as a believer that might be considered controversial to others? What freedoms do you not have that other believers believe that they do have? How does this principle work in your world, where life and the Bible meet?

It is never right to cause another believer to violate his or her own conscience, just so we can exercise our freedom in Messiah.



From general principles regarding **God** and **idols**, **Paul** moves to the specific issue at hand, namely, whether it is permissible for a **believer** to sit in a pagan temple and **eat meat sacrificed to idols**. **His** goal at this stage is to illustrate how **love** rather than **knowledge** builds up the body of **believers** in **Corinth** (**to see link click [Bl](#) - Let Love Control Knowledge**). But we must always keep in mind that by the time **Paul** reaches the end of these three chapters (see **[Bj](#) - Concerning Our Liberty in Messiah**), **he** flat-out says that it is wrong for any **believer** to **eat a meal in the temple of an idol (10:20-21)**.²¹⁹

Paul reminds **the knowledge-driven believer** of an additional truth. One which **they** must have known but they didn't take into consideration when exercising **their freedom** in **Messiah**.

*Dear Wonderful Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** great **love**, even in times of judgment. In **Your** holiness **You** could immediately slap down all who sin, but you don't. After people die, they will have an eternal terrible punishment for ignoring **Your love** and choosing to **love** themselves more than **You** (**John 3:36**). But while people are alive, **You** patiently call them to **Your** gracious **love**. **You** know we are **weak**. **For He knows our frame. He remembers that we are but dust** (**Psalms 103:14**). **You, O God**, are mighty in power- yet **You** are also gracious and kind. **ADONAI is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and plentiful in mercy. He will not always accuse, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not treated us according to our sins, or repaid us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy for those who fear Him** (**Psalms 103:8-11**).*

***You** are always **loving and full of mercy**. Not just on good days are **You** kind and thoughtful- but always, forever **You** are watching over **Your children** to care for and to bless **them**. **But the mercy of Adonai is from everlasting to everlasting on those who revere Him, His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant, who remember to observe His instructions** (**Psalms 103:17-18**).*

***You** have a special spot in **Your** heart for those who are all alone and weak. **Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world** (**James 1:27**). We desire to **love You** by following **Your** example of gracious kindness to those who are **weak** - whether widows, orphans or brothers and sisters in **Messiah** who are **weak** in their understanding of spiritual principles. Thank **You** for living in us (**John 14:23, Romans 8:9-11**) to help us to be loving and full of **mercy** - just like you! We bow in worship of such a loving and awesome **father**! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Against **his** insistence that, "**We all have knowledge**" (8:1b), **Paul** now asserts that "**not everyone has this knowledge**." Moreover, some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat food which has been sacrificed to them, they think of it as **really affected by the idol** (8:7a). Not all **believers** were mature in **their knowledge** and understanding of spiritual truths. Some were new **believers**, freshly out of paganism and its many temptations and corruptions. **They** still imagined that **idols**, though evil, were real and **the gods** represented were real. **They** may tell **their** heads that **the god** is only an

idol, but **their hearts** tell **them** differently. **They** knew that there was only **one** true **God**, but perhaps **they** had not yet fully grasped the truth that there was only **one real God**.

If such **people**, following the example of **the knowledge-driven believer**, goes ahead and **eats** what **their conscience** tells **them** not to eat, **their conscience, being weak, is thus defiled (8:7b)**. Even though the **eating** in itself was not morally or spiritually wrong, **it** becomes wrong when **it** is committed against one's own **conscience**. **A person** who violates **his conscience** willingly does what **he** thinks is wrong. In **his** own mind, **he** has committed a **sin**; and until he fully understands that the act is not a **sin** in **God's** eyes, **he** should stay away from it. **He who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin (Romans 14:23)**. **Defiled conscience is defiled faith**. As **the weak one** cannot reconcile the difference between **his** head and **his** heart, **eating meat sacrificed to idols** brought on feelings of guilt, despair, and loss of joy and peace. It might also lead to **sinful** thoughts connected with **his** former pagan practices and have **him** lapse back into some of them. **He** would not lose **his** salvation (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer](#)), but **he** would lose rewards in heaven, exchanging **gold, silver and precious stones** for **wood, hay and straw (3:12)**.

You have your **weaknesses** and I have mine (chocolate). In that sense, each one of us is **the weaker brother** or **sister**. **Paul's** primary point here is that anyone who causes such a **weaker brother** or **sister** to defile **their conscience** and **faith** helps to lead **them** into **sin**. **Knowledge** may well tell us that something is perfectly acceptable, but **love** will tell us that, because it is not acceptable to a fellow **believer's conscience**, we should not take advantage of our **freedom**.²²⁰

"Oh, come on, **Paul**," says this **knowledge-driven believer**, "**food** is morally and spiritually neutral. **Food** doesn't drive us away from **God** or draw us closer to **Him**." In a sense, of course, **Paul** would agree, saying: **Now food will not improve our relationship with God - we will be neither poorer if we abstain nor richer if we eat (8:8)**. **For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and you in the Ruach Ha'Kodesh (Romans 14:17)**. What enables one to grow spiritually is the condition of one's **heart**.²²¹

But this is precisely the point. If **the weak brother** eats some of **the food sacrificed to idols in the temple**, in **his heart** he will be expressing devotion to that **idol**. That, **Paul** tells **the knowledge-driven believer**, is unacceptable: **Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to**

stumble (8:9). Obviously, some **Corinthian believers** could not handle such **freedom**; it would pull **them** down into the pit from which **they** had been delivered. If **an** immature **believer** sees us doing something that troubles **his conscience**, **his** spiritual growth is harmed. We should never influence a fellow **believer** to do anything that **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**, through that person’s **conscience**, is protecting **him** from.

In fact, **Paul** goes on to say: **You have this “knowledge”; but suppose someone with a weak conscience sees you sitting, eating a meal in the temple of an idol. Won’t he be built up wrongly to eat this food which has been sacrificed to idols? Then the weak person, the brother for whom Christ died, is ruined by your knowledge (8:10-11).** It would bring spiritual disaster. In that case, **a knowledge-driven believer** causes **the weak brother** into **sin** by leading **him** into a situation **he** cannot handle. It is *never* right to cause another **believer** to violate **his** or **her** own **conscience** just so we can exercise our **freedom** in **Messiah**.

The voice of **a believer’s conscience** is the instrument of **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**. If a **believer’s conscience** is **weak** it is because **he** is spiritually **weak** and immature. **The conscience** is **God’s** guardian to keep us from doing things where we could be harmed. As we mature, our **conscience** allows us to go more places and to do more things because we will have more spiritual strength and better spiritual judgment. **And so, when you sin against the brothers by wounding their conscience when it is weak, you are sinning against the Messiah (8:12)!** Causing **a brother to stumble** is more than an offense against **him**, it is an offense against our **Lord**. That is a strong warning. Surely, no **believer** would desire to do that.²²²

Paul concludes this section with **his** own personal testimony: **To sum up, if food will be a snare for my brother, I will never eat meat again, lest I cause my brother to stumble (8:13).** **Paul** leaves **his** readers to think about this for a chapter-and-a-half; however, this is not **his** final word on this question, which **he** takes up again at **10:23**. But by inserting **himself** into the discussion at this point, **Paul** leads us directly into the next chapter, which is filled with **his** own personal example (see [Bn - Paul’s Own Example](#)).

In deciding about whether or not to participate in any behavior that is doubtful, the following principles make a good checklist to follow:

Excess: Is the activity or habit necessary, or is it merely an extra that is not really important? Is it perhaps only an encumbrance that you should willingly give up. **So then, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us, too, put aside every impediment - that is, the sin which easily hampers our forward movement -**

and keep running with endurance in the contest set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

Expediency: Is what I want to do **helpful** or useful, or only desirable? You say, “For me, everything is permitted.” Maybe, but not everything is helpful (First Corinthians 6:12).

Emulation: If we are doing what **Messiah** would do, our action is not only permissible, but good and right. **Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Yeshua did (First John 2:6).**

Example: Are we setting the right **example** for others, especially for **weaker brothers and sisters**? If we emulate **Messiah**, others will be able to emulate us, to follow our **example**. **Set the believers as an example in your speech, behavior, love, trust and purity (First Timothy 4:12).**

Evangelism: Is my testimony going to be helped or hindered? Will unbelievers be drawn to **Messiah** or turned away from **Him** by what I am doing? Will it help me conduct myself **with wisdom towards outsiders, making the most of the opportunity (Colossians 4:5 NASB).**

Edification: Will I be built up and matured **in Messiah**; will I become spiritually stronger? You say, “Everything is permitted.” Maybe, but not everything is edifying (First Corinthians 10:23).

Exaltation: Will **the Lord** be lifted up and glorified in what I do? **God’s** glory and exaltation should be the supreme purpose behind everything we do. **Whatever you do, whether it’s eating or drinking or anything else, do it all so as to bring glory to God (First Corinthians 10:31).**²²³