

Idol Problems and Principles For Christian Living

Introduction to chapter 8:1-11:1

Paul is responding to an additional matter from their correspondence to him, 7:1

In 8:1, Paul is responding to the matter of food and idol worship. 8:1, 4, 10:14

Similar to 7:1, Paul quotes from their letter and then responds to what they have written to him

In 7:1, "It is good for a man not to marry," is not Paul's teaching. It is his citation of their letter and what follows is his correction of their defective thinking.

In 8:1 what they said was, "We know that we all possess knowledge." Paul's response to their defective thinking is found in the rest of chapter 8.

Matters in Chapter 8

What were the problems in chapter 8?

There were two

Eating food sacrificed to idols, 8:1, 4

Eating in the idols' temples, 8:10

What were they teaching?

Since idols aren't real, and we all know that, it doesn't matter if we eat in idol temples or eat food offered to idols, 8:4-6.

What took place at idol feasts?

Preparation

The sacrifice proper

A slaughtered animal would be brought to an altar, his carcass would be dedicated to an idol

Part of the animal would be burned, consumed before the idol in the idol's honor

Part would be apportioned to the worshippers for their consumption

The feast itself

They were viewed and a religious and social meal.

Idol gods were thought to be present at the meal

But they were intensely social occasions for the participant.

Most of the Gentles who had become believers in Corinth had likely attended such meals all their lives. It was the basic “restaurant” in antiquity and every kind of occasion was celebrated in this fashion.

Why did this matter to the Corinthians?

“Joining in meals was extremely important in the ancient world because they served...as opportunities to converse and build friendships, and as a means to fulfill sociopolitical obligations.”

“Anyone desisting from public sacrificial events was unfit for public functions. To rebuff the invitations of friends, neighbors, and patrons not only would cause one’s social status to plummet but would also mark one off as odd and repugnant.”

To shun gatherings that lubricated social and economical relations would make Christians conspicuous outcasts who held outlandish, antisocial, perverse religious beliefs.

If they were to be accepted by their peers; if they had hopes to climb the social and financial ladders at Corinth, they would need to attend such feasts.

What was the basic issue?

Paul says that cooperating with idol worship is wrong even though one has been endowed with “liberating knowledge.”¹

What had Paul consistently taught every church about idol worship?

That idol worship in any form was wrong.

1 Thess 1:9, 10

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Gal 4:8-9

¹ Much of the material in these sections is somewhat free quotations from Fee and Garland’s commentaries on 1 Corinthians.

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

1 Corinthians 12:2

² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.

1 Corinthians 6:9

⁹ Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters ... will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were.

1 Corinthians 10:14

¹⁴ Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

Acts 17:16

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.²

Why is this matter so important?

It is a matter of love for Christ and the weaker brother, 8.

It is a matter of serving and pleasing Christ, not insisting on one's rights, 9.

It is a theological matter of great concern 10.

It is a matter of love for Christ and the weaker brother, 8

In 8:1 what they said was, “We know that we all possess knowledge.” Paul’s response to their defective thinking is found in the rest of chapter 8.

Knowledge or love?

Knowledge that is not motivated by love for Christ and people produces pride, 8:1c.

The Christian must always be concerned about building others up, 8:1d, not using his “rights.”

²The Holy Bible: New International Version. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Ac 17:16). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

You are correct about what you know, 8:4-6.

But you must be concerned with what your knowledge might do to a weaker brother who does not know what you do, 8:7.

While you may be free to eat (based upon your premises alone), you are not free to cause your brother to stumble, 8:8-11.

When you do something that causes your brother to stumble, you sin against him and against Christ, 8:12.

So what?

A Christian who loves Christ and his/her brother/sister might be called on, for the sake of Christ and his brother or sister, to abstain from things that would advance their social or financial agenda in order to prevent a brother or sister from stumbling. Would you do that?