



Limiting Christian Liberty (1 Cor. 8:1-13)

People often utter statements like, *“I can do whatever I want and no one can tell me what to do.”* Most people know what they believe and are willing to stand up for their rights. They believe certain things and no one will change their minds.



In the Christian life we can generally do what we want to do. Christianity is not a list of things you can't do, but rather Christianity allows us to live life to the fullest. Being a Christian makes life more enjoyable not less.

A lot of people misunderstand the Christian life viewing it as a religion of *“thou shalt nots.”* Christianity should not be viewed in such a negative way. Living for Christ is freedom. Our life in Christ frees us from fear. It frees us from guilt. It frees us from ignorance. It frees us to help others. Life in Christ brings us fellowship, and friendship, and belonging, and satisfaction.

Still, as we live for Christ we need to understand that in all of our freedom we need to consider other people. We do not live in a vacuum, but exist in a world filled with other people. In exercising our freedom in Christ we are concerned with other people.

There are things we know not to do as Christians because the Bible is specific about them. There are other actions that the Bible does not directly address. How can we decide whether or not to do something when there is no clear Bible teaching about the matter?

1. Name three things the Bible clearly prohibits and then name three questionable matters.

I. The Problem in Corinth

In chapter eight Paul is answering a question that the Corinthian Christians had asked him about. The problem concerned eating meat that had been offered to idols. Corinth was a pagan city that was filled with the worship of a great number of false gods. For every false god there was an idol and a temple in which to worship this idol. There were idols for every part of life on earth. There were idols for the sun and the moon. There were idols for war and love. There were idols for the earth and the sea.

When meat was sacrificed to these idols some of it was consumed in the fire and part of it was kept by the priests as payment for their services. The meat that the priests received was far more than they could use themselves so they would take what was left over to the marketplace to sell. The meat that was sold in this manner was highly regarded by the people because it had been blessed by their gods. It was certainly the best meat that was available in the city. Often times the meat was consumed in the idol temples and could be in celebration of a birthday, marriage, or commercial activity. To refuse to attend a banquet such as this would remove the Corinthian Christians from their normal social life.

The question that arose among the Christians was whether or not to eat this meat or to dine in the temples. Some said, *“Of course we can eat this meat. These idols are simply wood and stone. They are not alive. They mean nothing.”* Other Christians said, *“We must not eat this meat because it has been used for the worship of a false God and this taints the meat. Furthermore, when someone sees this Christian eat the meat it looks as if he is also worshipping this false god.”* And so we have the dilemma. Should the Christians eat this meat or should they resist eating this meat? While this specific problem may not be present in any churches in our country, the same type of questions exist within churches.

2. How do questionable matters affect the church and individual Christians today?

II. Recognise that Love is More Important Than Freedom

Paul writes in verse 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.”* An idol was just wood or stone so an idol could not defile the meat because there was nothing real behind the idol. (This is not entirely true -- see 1 Cor. 10:20). Many of the Corinthian Christians understood this, but while they possessed knowledge they used it arrogantly. Paul warns these Christians in verse 1, *“knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.*



3. What are good definitions for “puffs up” and “builds up”?

When knowledge puffs up, or makes one prideful, or arrogant he feels superior to other Christians and this prideful knowledge can make one Christian devalue another.

4. What are some ways in which “knowledgeable” Christians can sometimes act arrogantly?

There is nothing wrong with knowledge and Christians should consistently try to gain a greater understanding of God through a study of the Bible, but it is also important that they understand that knowledge can be harmful if used with the wrong attitude. Paul had previously written about the arrogance of some in the Corinthian church in 1 Cor. 4:6,-7, 18. Their problem was not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of love.

Verses 2 and 3 tell us, *“If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.* The one who is “puffed up” with knowledge does not really possess the knowledge that he needs, but is enamoured with himself. He needs to love God and then he will love others more than himself.

5. What do we learn about God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in verse 6?

6. What is the difference between the words “from” and “through” in verse 6?

III. Understand That Your Rights Are Less Important Than Your Brother's Spiritual Condition

In verse 7, Paul informs the Corinthians that not everyone possesses the knowledge that caused some to be “puffed up.” Some had been formerly associated with idol worship and it harmed their conscience to eat the meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

7. Define the word “conscience”?

8. How is the conscience trained?

9. Is it wrong to violate our conscience? (Rom 14:23)

Eating food sacrificed to idols did not bring one closer to God and not eating this meat did not take one further from God (vs. 8). Therefore the deciding factor is that it harms the conscience of a brother who is weaker. In verse 9 this “right” or “liberty” to eat meat sacrificed to idols is addressed. The fact is that no Christian has the right to do something (even if it is not wrong) if it is going to harm another Christian.

10. Why is the Christian whose conscience was harmed by eating the idol meat called “weak”?

11. What is a stumbling block?



According to **verses 11-13** a Christian can destroy the faith of a weaker brother through an insistence on his rights. In this case something that is not inherently wrong has become a sin. Paul says to harm the faith of a weaker brother is to sin against that brother and to sin against Christ.

There is a difference between something that may irritate or annoy another and something that truly causes them to stumble. Our styles of music or dress may make another Christian unhappy, but it does not harm their faith. Paul is not teaching that we should stop every single thing that may offend another person or that we should give in to everyone who complains about something. He does teach that if we are involved in an activity (even if it is not wrong) which harms the faith and conscience of a brother then we must stop or we are sinning.

12. What is the difference between annoying a brother and causing him to stumble?

13. How do we know that other Christians are valuable? (vs. 11)

14. What is the meaning of “destroyed” in verse 11?

15. What principle is taught in 1 Cor. 8:13?