

## The Better Answer

1 Cor 8-10 are three chapters that focus on something that seems **strange** at first to modern ears, **eating of food offered to idols**. But eating food offered to idols was itself an instance of behavior that fits into **a larger category**, one that you know very well, the category of **questionable practices**.

Here is what I mean. **Christian behavior** can be divided roughly into **two buckets**. The first bucket holds what I'd like to call **clear issues**. These are things that are **commanded** or **prohibited** in scripture. For example, no stealing, no killing, no worshipping false gods and the rest of the 10 commandments. Sexual faithfulness and purity are in this bucket. Loving our enemies is there. Telling the truth is there. Helping the poor is there. Reading the Bible and learning how to pray are there. Forgiving people who have sinned against us is there, following Jesus is there, being a witness to people is there, and so on.

But there is a second bucket filled with **questionable issues**. These are questionable because the scripture is not clear about them. They are **not commanded or commended or prohibited**. But over the years, for lots of different reasons, people have **questioned them**. The old **list** was smoking and drinking and card playing and dancing and Sunday sports and styles of music and going to movies. Once I give you this list, you would know that there are certain Christians who have prohibited these things while there are others who have permitted them. In the **early church** military service and political office and working in the theaters were on this list. Some Christians permitted them and others prohibited

them.

In addressing the questionable issues, Christians quickly broke into **two camps with two answers**. The first was the **Legalism Camp**. These are Christians who believe that every area of life is either **right or wrong**, black or white, **no shades of grey**. Some people just do see life that way. The Pharisees did. They had a rule and a regulation for everything.

The second group was what we might call the **Liberty Camp**. They knew that Christ had set us free from a life of rules and regulations. And that God has trusted us to figure a lot of stuff out, and that good people can disagree about these questionable practices without being disagreeable. Or so they hoped.

**Here is the problem:** How do you figure it out and keep Christians together? You can see the problem!!

### **The Presenting Problem: Food offered to idols**

*'Now about food sacrificed to idols'* 1 Co 8:1

The **temples** were the primary social institution of much of the ancient world. It was in the temples that people gathered for family events, religious events, and often civic events. In the temples people would be married and buried. In the temples they would celebrate the seasons and entreat the gods for help and health, for babies and crops and victory in times of war.

When they gathered, they brought **sacrifices** to offer to the gods. The sacrifices were often animals that would be slaughtered and cut into 3 portions:

1. given to priest & offered to gods
2. eaten in temple by the worshippers

3. taken home or sent to the marketplace.

Temples were like the local restaurant or banquet halls.

**Question:** Was this food spiritually contaminated because it had been offered to idols? Did eating this food mean they were opening themselves to demons again? These were important questions!

### **What They Knew**

*"Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that "we all have knowledge" about this issue...*

*So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God.*

*It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't lose anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do."*

1 Corinthians 8:1, 4, 8 NLT

Their starting point:

We know that 'we all have knowledge'... 1Cor 8:1

"Knowledge" was an important thing to them, a remarkable thing! "knowledge" is truth. And when the gospel came to Corinth, truth came to Corinth, and **truth set people free** from all the lies about the idols.

What we 'know':

- An idol is nothing at all; there is no God but one
- Food does not bring us near to God: no better if we do eat or worse if we don't eat.

- We have freedom

The meat eaters were right!

But not so fast...

*"But some... eat ...and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. this right of yours [can] become a stumbling block to the weak.*

*Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ."*

1 Cor 8:7-12

vs 7 some eat, conscience weak (they are not sure what they have done is right), defiled

vs 9 exercise of your freedom becomes a stumbling block to weak; (they see what you do, and then **even though uncertain**, follow your example, wound their own conscience, stumble and fall...)

vs 11 this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

vs 12 you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ

**You were right, but you were wrong.** You can be right and wrong at the same time. So what does Paul say? Legalism? No. Liberty? Well, Yes, but No...

Here's Paul's **Better Answer Not Legalism or Liberty, but Love**

*"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much."*

1 Cor 8:1-2

Paul puts it pretty bluntly. Knowing all the answers can be a trap, because it can 'puff you up'. You **think you are better** than everyone else. Or **smarter** than everyone else. And you think knowing all the answers is what it is all about. I know too many Christians who are **big on answers and short on love**. That is exactly what Paul is doing here. They were big on answers and short on love.

So he gives a third way. A better way. **The answer of love.** **What do you do** about all those areas of behavior that are questionable? Well, **do what builds people up**. Even if you have to **give up in order to build up...**

*Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.*

1 Cor 8.13

Wow! That is Christian liberty, Christian freedom.

Martin Luther said it like this:

*A Christian is a "perfectly free lord of all, subject to none";  
A Christian is a "perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all".*

How free are you?

Free enough to give up your freedom for the sake of love?

**Your freedom is not for you, but for others;** the strongest are those who use their liberty for love.

Apply to:

- \* food and drink (East Africa smoking and drinking)
- \* clothing (modesty)

\* Customs and traditions (Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral 1886/88) BCP p.876, pt. 3 & p.877, last paragraph:

"In all things of human ordering or human choice... This church is ready in the spirit of love and humility to forego all preferences of her own..."

Truro survey on change of Sun AM time: "If you change one more thing, I will leave."

\* The spread of the Gospel (all things to all men that I might win some to Christ). Punk rockers in Amsterdam

\* The healing of your marriage...  
are you willing to forego all preferences of your own for that so priceless a blessing might happily be brought to pass?

What Paul **has before his eyes** in all these difficulties is the cross of Jesus is the place where real liberty is learned! Real liberty is the Son of God being bound and crucified, freely surrendering his rights and privileges for us!

### **A difficult question:**

What if you surrender your liberty for the sake of love, and worse comes to worse; it doesn't seem to make a difference?

turn other cheek, extra mile, forgive 70 X 7

& you still live in a difficult situation

or you are still called to an impossible ministry

threaten to perish under the burden?

Then...

you are in the best company

you will have been made like unto the Son of God

Jesus himself shall be your reward

Brothers and Sisters, Let us love one another!