

What is the World, and How Has it Influenced Us?

Message 6 – “Worldliness and Personal Convictions”

1 Cor. 8:1-13

Introduction: This morning we are going to be in 1 Cor. 8, so if you'd like to turn there we are going to start winding down our summer series on “the world.” I have two pretty important issues I need to address before we go back to Revelation (where we will be starting with chapter four), and if we don't talk about these matters, our study of the world will be incomplete. This morning, I want to speak to you about worldliness and personal convictions. The question I want to answer for you is, “How should I respond to a brother in the Lord who I don't believe is where he should be spiritually?”

I could rephrase the question this way. “How should I respond to a brother who does stuff that I don't think he should be doing?” In other words, he is engaged in activities that I believe are “worldly,” and I have a conviction against what he is doing, but he doesn't. And while we may not actually articulate it, our thinking is that if he would just grow up spiritually, he wouldn't do it either. Or if he had some spiritual maturity, he wouldn't be doing that activity either. How do we handle situations like this?

Well, the reality of our situation is that we are all at different stages in our walk with the Lord. We are all at different points in our Christian growth. We are all at different levels of spiritual maturity. This is why the Bible talks about milk and meat in Hebrews 5:12-13. Spiritual infants need milk while those who are more mature need spiritual meat. Paul says that when he was a child he thought like a child and acted like a child, but when he grew up and became a man, he put away childish things. So in any Christian group, we have spiritual newborns, spiritual infants, spiritual adolescents, and spiritual adults. And by the way, this has nothing to do with how long you have been saved! I know people who are spiritual infants who have been saved for double digit years. But the point here is that this reality can cause friction in the body of Christ. How are we supposed to handle it when this group of believers believes that

the activity of that group of believers is worldly? That is what we are going to talk about this morning.

Now fortunately, we have several passages in the NT that directly address this scenario, one of them being our passage under consideration this morning, 1 Cor. 8 (the other passage that deals with this topic is Rom. 14). So let's work our way through these 13 verses and see what we can learn. Does Paul give us any principles to follow when dealing with fellow Christians who don't hold to the same personal convictions you do.

Let me give you a very important point of background about this passage that will help us in our understanding of the issue. The church in Corinth had written a letter to the Apostle Paul asking him a series of questions. This is why in 7:1 Paul says, "*Now concerning the things about which you wrote.*" They had three questions on their mind. The first one had to do with marriage, the second one had to do with singleness, and the third one had to do with eating food that had been offered to an idol. There is a marker in the text that shows us every time Paul changes his topic, and it is the phrase "*now concerning.*" We see it in 7:1, 7:25, and 8:1.

So in chapter 7 Paul deals with the first two questions. Then starting in chapter 8 he begins his treatment of eating meat offered to idols. The point that is important for you to understand is that Paul's treatment of this matter lasts for three chapters. When we get to the end of chapter 8, he is not done with the issue. What we have in chapter 8 is a list of broad principles that apply to the issue. Chapter 9 is a personal illustration from Paul's life of how he has applied the principles of chapter 8. In other words, the principles of chapter 8 are broad enough that they can be applied to lots of different scenarios. Chapter 10 is a series of three parting shots that bring the issue to a close.

The first point Paul makes in chapter 10 (vv. 1-13) is that God deals strongly with people who focus on self. The second point (vv. 14-22) is that godly wisdom focuses on the heart. And

the final point (vv. 23-33) is that godly maturity is demonstrated by personal sacrifice, not personal liberty. So just keep in mind that in this matter of eating meat offered to idols, Paul's answer spans three chapters.

So let's go to chapter 8 verse 1 and see what we can learn from this passage about dealing with other Christians who don't have the same convictions you do.

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that "we all have knowledge." Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

How many of you are using a version of the Bible that has the phrase "we all have knowledge" in quote marks? Some of the newer versions do this because apparently Paul is quoting the letter they wrote to him. In other words, their self-assessment was that they were a pretty smart group of people. So Paul is going to use their own words now to make his point. And what is that point? "*Knowledge makes arrogant.*" Can you appreciate that Paul's answer to this group of people is not starting out on a positive note? He acknowledges their "smarts," but then cautions them about it. And then he contrasts knowledge with love by saying that "*love edifies.*"

So what Paul is doing right here at the outset is establishing two platforms from which they can operate. They can organize their life and live their Christian life based on their knowledge, or they can base their Christian life on love. While both of these are legitimate platforms, one is self-focused and the other is others-focused. Knowledge has a tendency to breed arrogance while love builds up others. I love the way Paul frames the discussion. He sets the parameters in stone – are you going to operate based on what you know, or are you going to operate based on concern for your brother in Christ?

Now, he gets even more pointed in verse two. "*If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.*" This is a tremendous blow to the Corinthian's pride.

Another way of putting this is “If you think you know something, you don’t have a clue.” If you think you have arrived, you are hopelessly lost. This is a very strong word of rebuke, and I would imagine that by this time, whoever had written this letter to Paul was wishing he hadn’t included the part about how knowledgeable they were!

So in verse three, Paul says “*but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.*” Here Paul is getting back to the two platforms, knowledge or love, but did you note the twist? Knowledge is something worth pursuing, but what kind of knowledge is it that we are after? God’s knowledge of us. And how are we going to attain that? By loving God. So to put these three verses in a nutshell – and this would be broad principle number one – in this issue of knowing how to deal with others in the body of Christ who don’t have the same convictions we do, our primary objective, our primary focus is to be on loving God and others, not exercising or implementing our knowledge about the situation at hand.

Now starting in verse four, Paul switches back and forth between what I have labeled as “reality” and “perception.” In verses 4 – 6 we see the reality of the issue.

⁴ Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols¹, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

In other words, that carving or statue of an idol isn’t really a god, in the real world it is a piece of wood or marble. That is the reality of the situation. It is inanimate, it isn’t breathing, it doesn’t hear you or see you. It can’t talk to you. It is a piece of carbon based material that has been shaped to look like something human. That is reality.

⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,⁶ yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.

1 Explain the two scenarios here = 1) meat offered to idols and 2) eating at a temple dinner.

Paul's point here is that just because you label something a "god" doesn't mean it is indeed a god. There are lots of pieces of marble, or stone, or wood, that people refer to as "god," but the reality of the situation is that there is only one God, the creator God, whose son is Jesus Christ.

Now in verse 7, Paul switches from reality to perception.

⁷ However not all men have this knowledge (a reference to vv. 4 – 6); but some, being accustomed to the idol until now (ESV – "through former association with idols"), eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

In other words, there were some people in the church in Corinth who had been saved out of paganism, and because of that former association with idols and animal sacrifices being made to the deity, that idol was very real to them. And to eat the meat that had been offered to that idol was a sinful activity that broke their fellowship with God and made it necessary to get forgiveness and cleansing from God. The word "*defiled*" there at the end of the verse is used four times in the NT, always in the context of the polluting, contaminating effect of sin.

But do you see from verse seven that the reality of the situation is irrelevant? What you know about chunks of wood that have been carved into the shape of a God and then overlaid with gold and silver doesn't matter. What matters is how the other believer perceives it. And this is a tremendous principle to keep in mind in situations like this. The issue that carries the day in these scenarios is not what you know to be true but the conscience of the other Christian. Which brings us right back to where Paul starts this discussion – which platform are you going to operate from, the platform of your knowledge or the platform of your love for someone else?

Now in verse 8, Paul gets back to reality. "*Food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.*" Paul here is reiterating what Jesus taught about the spirituality of food – there is none! When you eat something, it goes into your stomach, is digested, and then eliminated. That is reality. That is science. It is not what goes

into the man that pollutes him, or defiles him; it is what comes out of the man that has a polluting effect. Of course, this is vastly different from the Old Covenant role of food where what you ate could defile you and break your fellowship with God. But the reality of life under the New Covenant is that food really doesn't matter. But this isn't the end of the issue, because look what Paul says in verse 9. *"But take care lest this liberty (the word literally means "power of choice," we could translate it as "knowledge") of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."*

And again, Paul is right back to his first point – what platform are you going to operate from, knowledge or love? Yes, you have the knowledge that idols are nothing. Yes, you have the liberty to eat that meat. But what about your brother in the Lord who isn't where you are in your understanding? The caution is that your knowledge of the reality of this whole situation could be a *"stumbling block"* to him. The word Paul uses here refers to something that would trip you and make you fall. And in the context, it would be a fall into sin. And to give us an illustration of how this works in this particular situation, we have an illustration in verse 10.

¹⁰ For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple (and here Paul isn't talking about meat offered to idols, but actually participating in a feast in a temple), will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

The point is that if the brother who is struggling in this area sees you participating in the activity he believes to be sinful, he could be encouraged to squelch the voice of his conscience and join in as well. And what are the consequences of doing that? There are two. The first is in verse 11 where we read, *"through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died."* Paul uses an amazingly strong word here to describe the effect on the weak brother who has gone against his conscience, it is the word ἀπόλλυμι. In Rev. 9:11 we read, *"They have a king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon."* That is the word Paul is using here, the weak brother is destroyed. He is

ruined. Now I believe Paul is speaking hyperbolically here – that brother is not going to hell for eating that meat – but the word is being used to get our attention. Paul wants us to see the magnitude of the consequences of exercising our knowledge. This is not a small matter!

But the second consequence is seen in verse 12 where we read, *“And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.”* This is where it gets very curious. Paul is telling us that when we exercise our rights and freedoms as New Covenant followers of Christ in such a way that it hurts one of our brothers in Christ, we have just sinned – *“you sin against Christ”*. That is staggering! This is no small matter, is it? But it helps us to understand Paul’s conclusion in verse 13.

¹³ Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

Paul would rather be a vegetarian than cause a brother in the Lord to stumble. And even though abstaining from meat will not commend Paul to the Lord, and even though Paul knows that there is no such thing as an idol, he will not operate from a platform of knowledge.

Conclusion: Next week I’ll give you several points of application to this matter of worldliness, but for now I just want to leave you with two points. First of all, do you see how Paul is going to operate from a platform of love for his brother? And secondly, do you see how he is going to demonstrate his spiritual maturity, not by exercising his personal freedoms, but by exercising personal sacrifice? There is a lot we can learn from that.

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge.

Knowledge makes arrogant, but **love** edifies.

² If anyone supposes that he knows anything,

he has not yet known as he ought to know;

cognitive dissonance?

³ but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

⁴ Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols,

we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and

that there is no God but one.

⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth,

as indeed there are many gods and many lords,

⁶ yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father,

from whom are all things,

and we *exist* for Him;

and one Lord, Jesus Christ,

by whom are all things,

and we *exist* through Him.

⁷ However not all men have this knowledge;

but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol;

and their conscience being weak is defiled (ολύνω - polluted, contaminated, the opposite of a clear conscience)

⁸ But food will not commend us to God;

we are neither the worse if we do not eat,

nor the better if we do eat.

⁹ But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

¹⁰ For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple,

will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

¹¹ For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

¹² And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak,

you sin against Christ.

¹³ Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.

³ But whoever loves God is known by God.

⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one."

⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"),

⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

⁷ But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?

¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.