

1 Corinthians 8:7-13 (12-13)

PREFACE

In our last session we examined the challenging v11 and, not surprisingly, considering its controversial nature, the class was divided on its interpretation. The meaning and application of the verse hinges on what Paul intends by his use of the Greek words *apollysthai* (“ruined”) and *adelphos* (“brother”). Does he mean by the first word permanent, eternal damnation, or just “cause the man to sin”? And does he mean by the second word a true brother in Christ—i.e., a Christian—or just someone associated with the local church?

Happily we can draw profitable application from the verse no matter our position on its interpretation, for causing someone to sin is different only in degree from causing someone to spend eternity in hell. Neither is a path the follower of Christ should follow; either one should cause sleepless nights.

When turning to the issue of publicly eating food that had been sacrificed to idols, as he does in v1 of the chapter, Paul immediately brings in the component of love.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-2.

It is understandable that we read that the first time and wonder what in the world that has to do with food sacrificed to idols. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, however, Paul knows precisely what he is doing, and as he draws the chapter to a close it becomes clear why he set it up as he did at its beginning.

The spark that ignited this discussion, in the letter sent to Paul from the Corinth church, may have gone something like this: *With all due respect, Paul, we do not think there is anything wrong with eating food that has been sacrificed to idols. After all, idols represent gods that do not even exist, so where is the harm?* Certain members of the Corinth church were considering the situation philosophically and, in a sense, practically. Paul agrees with them to that extent: The food is not tainted because it has been associated with an imaginary deity. But the real issue is not the meat, but the *witness*. What might happen to someone else—a brother with a weaker conscience—who sees you doing this? That is far more important—potentially fatally so—than the condition of the meat itself. And in the last two verses of the chapter, before us today, the apostle draws his conclusion and preliminary verdict (a verdict expanded in Chapter Ten).

Read 1 Corinthians 8:7-13.

v12

And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

There are times when we wonder what is meant by the phrase “personal Savior” (one not found in the Bible, by the way). Here, in v12, we have part of the reason for that comforting terminology.

And so,

The KJVs and NIV “bury the lead” somewhat by not beginning the verse (as do the NASB and ESV) with *houtos*, translated “And so,” and “Thus,” respectively, obviously referring back to what he has just stated in vv10-11.

Sidebar:

NKJV: but when you **thus** sin...

NIV: When you sin against your brothers **in this way**...

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

This is a more broadly worded reiteration of vv10-11, in which the brother was singular rather than plural (“brethren” in v12) and the result was ruination, rather than “wounding” in v12 (*typto*).

Verse 12 is a bucket of cold water thrown in the believer’s face. Inundated day after day by the standards and practices of this fallen world and depraved society, our faith and behavior—that is, *what we deem to be appropriate behavior for a Christian*—becomes corrupted, weathered, with all its sharply defined edges worn down. Any time we take our cues from the world rather than from God’s word, we are replacing truth with a lie. And the world continuously drives into the psyche that *I* am important, that *my* rights are the rights that matter, that whatever *I* want is more important than what anyone else wants. As a result we have a society of spoiled brats. But God’s word says something diametrically opposed to this.

Read Philippians 2:3-4.

To the Romans Paul wrote that, “We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.” (Romans 15:1-2)

Those who spend every day out in the business world, in the “educational” institutions, or who spend countless hours listening to the garbage dispensed by the news networks or social media face a daily struggle to live by the wisdom that comes down from heaven. And here Paul splashes some cold water in our face to bring us back to the truth.

Paul first declares that when we do something like the man in this chapter who cared more for his rights than the conscience of a weaker brother, it is not just bad manners; it is sin.

hamartano = perhaps from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and the base of <G3313> (meros); properly to miss the mark (and so not share in the prize), i.e. (figurative) to err, especially (moral) to sin :- for your faults, offend, sin, trespass; to do wrong.

More than that, it is not just some hidden, private offense, but it is a public (just like the eating) offense *against* a brother or sister. What form does this sin take? What *is* the offense?

and wounding their conscience when it is weak,

wounding = *typto* = a primary verb (in a strengthened form); to “thump”, i.e. cudgel or pummel (properly with a stick or bastinado), but in any case by repeated blows; thus differing from <G3817> (paio) and <G3960> (patasso), which denote a [usually single] blow with the hand or any instrument, or <G4141> (plesso) with the fist [or a hammer], or <G4474> (rhapizo) with the palm; as well as from <G5177> (tugchano), an accidental collision); by implication to punish; figurative to offend (the conscience) :- beat, smite, strike, wound. (Garland: “The word does not mean here ‘causing pain to,’ but ‘striking a blow against.’” A. T. Robertson: “to smite with fist, staff, whip.”)

With that in mind, the word “wounding” seems almost too tame; such behavior is tantamount to forcing someone into a corner and beating them unmercifully.

...you sin against Christ.

There is our “personal Savior.” For believers, Christ Jesus is so thoroughly—and inextricably—embedded in our lives—and we in His—that when we sin against a brother we are really sinning against our Lord. Jesus Himself describes this intimate connection with His followers in his last extended discourse before His arrest—this describing the Final Judgment.

Read Matthew 25:31-45

Notice what Jesus said to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

Read Acts 9:3-6.

As far as we know, Saul had never been in the presence of Jesus, but simply because the zealot had been persecuting Christ's followers, he had actually been persecuting Jesus Himself.

v13

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

The apostle Paul is a wise teacher. In this instance (perhaps because of his knowledge of the Corinthians' combative nature), he does not command *their* behavior, but his own. He instructs not by condemnation of their behavior, but by setting himself as the example—that is, he places the burden on himself. (However, Paul *will* issue a command to them on this in Chapter 10.)

We will see later that one thing Paul is doing here is setting up his argument in Chapter Nine: “an impassioned defense of his apostleship” (Fee).

Here is where the rubber meets the road; here is where being a Christian in *this* world really means something. And here is the climax to how he began this part of his letter with “Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies” (v1).

stumble, fall into sin^{niv} = *skandalizo* = (“scandalize”); **from** <G4625> (*skandalon*); **to entrap, i.e. trip up** (figurative stumble [transitive] or **entice to sin**, apostasy or displeasure) :- **(make to) offend**.

skandalon = (“scandal”); probably from a derivative of <G2578> (*kampto*); **a trap-stick (bent sapling), i.e. snare** (figurative cause of displeasure or sin) :- occasion to fall (of stumbling), offence, thing that offends, stumbling block.

This is a convicting passage. Again, no matter your reading of v11, causing someone to sin is different only in degree from causing someone to spend eternity in hell. Either result is an egregious offense against a brother in Christ, or even just a friend or acquaintance.

Gordon Fee: The real concern of the passage needs a regular hearing in the church. Personal behavior is dictated not by knowledge, freedom, or law, but by love for those within the community of faith. Everything one does that affects relationships within the body of Christ should have care for brothers and sisters as its primary motivation.

David Guzik: It is easy for a Christian to say, “I answer to God and God alone” and to ignore his brother or sister. It is true we will answer to God and God alone; but we will answer to God for how we have treated our brother or sister.