

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

-MESSY (BUT BEAUTIFUL) CHRISTIANITY, WEEK 27-

1 Corinthians 8 (NIV)

I. OUR ULTIMATE _____: _____, NOT _____

¹ 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.

II. OUR ULTIMATE _____: ONE _____, ONE _____

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.

III. OUR ULTIMATE _____: THE _____ OF _____

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.

THE BOTTOM LINE

In the Church, Put _____ before Our _____

...by _____ our example may negatively (or positively) _____.

...by, when faced with a difficult _____, asking “How does _____ demonstrate _____ and _____ for others?”

...by being willing to _____ our _____ for the _____ others.

A Closer Look: Idol Food (Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 75-76)

Just as Jews and Christians thanked God for food before they ate, others honored their deities at all meals, including ordinary banquets. When associations met for banquets, the food was often dedicated to their patron deity. Libations of wine were poured to the deity during banquets.

The association of dining with deities was even more obvious at public festivals honoring those deities, such as Poseidon or the emperor. Ancients generally did not waste much meat sacrificed to the gods, but ate most of it after it was cooked. Naturally festivals produced an excess of meat, so even the masses, which normally could afford little meat, could participate then. These were special occasions and privileges that few citizens would want to miss. (Meat was not the only sacrifice offered to idols, but it produced more “leftovers” from the sacrifice and constituted a special treat for those who shared it.)

Apart from festivals, people might eat meat from the idol’s temple within the sacred precincts of the temple, but it also showed up in nearby restaurants and in the meat market. Apart from Jewish, kosher-butchered meat (which might, some think have become unavailable under the anti-Jewish proconsul Gallio, in response to Claudius’s anti-Jewish policy in Rome), or meat specifically identified as from a temple, one might not know the source of all meat procured in the market. Most meat in urban markets may have come from temples (certainly much meat was sacrificial in some cities like Pompeii). But the possibility that some was not, and that much was not labeled, might allow one to not know for certain if one chose not to investigate (10:25). Some Judean teachers later criticized Diaspora Jews for attending pagan banquets with their children, even though these Diaspora Jews often brought their own food.

The patronage system, families, friendships, and business acquaintances all sometimes involved invitations to dinner. Paul seeks to minimize complications (10:27-29) but will not compromise with anything appearing to endorse idolatry (10:20-21). Such conflicts would especially challenge Christians of status, such as Erastus and Gaius (Rom 16:23); Jews were already accustomed to the struggles in avoiding such food.

Applying This Chapter (Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 432-33)

Despite the fact that Western Christianity for over a millennium has had nothing in its culture comparable to this issue, this text has had a long history of use in the church in the form of the “stumbling-block principle.” But much that has been said in this regard would derive better from a later passage (10:31-11:1) or later letter (Rom. 14). A few items need to be noted.

- (1) The issue is not that of “offending” someone in the church. It has to do with conduct that another would “emulate”—indeed, in this case apparently is being urged to emulate—to their own hurt.
- (2) Usually this principle is invoked in more peripheral matters of behavior. But that, too, is not the case here. While it is true that at the end (v. 13) Paul broadens the scope considerably, the specific issue is something that he will eventually forbid altogether. Nonetheless, the greater issues for him in this section—the attitudinal ones—do need careful hearing: people arguing for certain kinds of behavior on the basis of knowledge and asserting their “authority/freedom” to the detriment of others.
- (3) What would seem to be an illegitimate use of the principle, even in the broader term of v. 13, is for those who feel “offended” to try to force all others to conform to their own idiosyncrasies of behavior. Paul makes it quite clear in Rom. 14 that on matters of indifference people within any given community should learn to live together in harmony, with no group demanding their own behavior of the others.
- (4) 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.

