

1 Cor. 8

We come not to another problem that Paul addressed himself to in the church at Corinth. This was a question that may seem to be so far-fetched to us today and yet, it's very, very relevant when they make application to the 20th century. The question they had written Paul is this: what should we do about eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols? Now, remember that ~~XXXXXX~~ Corinth, the great city of Corinth was a city that was dedicated to the worship of pagan idols.

Everybody in the city had a god, with a little 'g'. There were poleytheus - not one god, there were many gods, that they had. They thought the way to worship these gods was to sacrifice animals unto them and so they did. In the sacrifice - they were sacrificed in three ways.

FIRST: There was just a token part of that animal that was burned unto their god. But the whole animal was said to be sacrificed to the god.

SECOND: The priest - he took part of the animal to eat for himself. Then, the rest of it was taken by the worshipper. Taken to his home, or sold to some market, and so, practically all the meat in Corinth had been formerly sacrificed unto a pagan god. Now the question arose 'is it right to eat this meat?' Is it right for a Xtn to eat this meat? And there were two schools of thought in Corinth as there is in every church and in every fellowship. We have them here tonight and it doesn't mean that one is better than the other. God loves all!

A. First there was strong people in the fellowship, who knew that these idols were nothing and it didn't bother them, if the meat had been sacrificed to idols. They said 'well, this just make believe. There is no such thing as an idol god and the meat is perfectly good'. But then there was another crowd in Corinth and that was

B. Second there was the weak crowd. They just did not understand and they were not able to accept this matter of partaking of meat that had been sacrificed to a pagan god.

So here's the church divided on this issue. One group saying 'we're going to eat all the meat we want' another group saying 'we don't know whether we should do this or not'. O, K. Paul comes along and he answers the question. You might wonder why he didn't just quote the Council of Jerusalem. You know the Council of Jerusalem legislated on this. We studied it when we studied Acts, in the 15th chapter. One of the things the Council said was 'to abstain from meat, or food, that had been sacrificed to idols'.  

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Why didn't Paul just write back 'now you know what the Jerusalem Council has done'. Course Paul is not a legalist. And Paul believes in getting to the depth of something and making application. It's not enough to quote Scrip. a lot of times. It's not enough to pass out a little rule to people who are really serious. That's not Xtnity. Paul went much further than Jerusalem Council and dealt with the situation in Corinth.

He left with us a principle that we must follow in our lives, if we're gonna be Xtn; if we're gonna have influence with people, we're going to relate. I think in our church, we have a beautiful situation and I think there's a tremendous sensitivity to one another and I thank god for it. But there's always need for instruction at this point. So he begins and let's look at this: 1 Cor. 8:

V. 1 (read) 'things offered unto idols' (I've already explained that). 'We know that we all have knowledge (we know that we all have some knowledge) and Paul is simply saying that all of you have some understanding of idols. You're not completely in the dark). But notice what he says and here is the key to the whole chapter. He says 'knowledge puffs up but charity (really that's the word 'agape' - that's the great N. T. word for 'love') but love edifieth (or builds us).

Now he's immediately speaking to these people who were stronger and he says 'now you have knowledge = you know there's no such thing as an idol god, but your knowlege will not solve the problem. It's not knowledge that builds up the body, but it's love'. And you know, that's

always true. I've never known a church to be divided or hurt because people loved each other, but I've known many a church hurt because there were folks in there who knew too much. Sometimes knew more than the pastor. And sometimes, the pastor can know too much. He can be arrogant. A pastor must be under the Lordship of Christ as well as the flock. We're aware of this. But knowledge - and just Bible knowledge - does not unite a church and it does not make a body of Christ.

This is something that young believers need to know. Someone has said that the Bible, to a <sup>54</sup> young believer, will either give him a burning heart or a big head! You start learning a lot of things, as a new believer, you better be real careful, you may say 'well, I know more than my people' or 'I know more than the pastor' when you don't even know enough to know that you don't know anything! You gotta be around a good while and you've got to walk with God a good while to find out you don't know much.

Knowledge is not the answer. But real "Agape" love and that ~~XOXO~~ always builds up. NOW in

V. 2b (read) and that's talking about the person who really thinks he knows and yet, in the answer, Paul says 'no, you really don't know. You just think you know'.

V. 3 (read) now you would think that Paul is not following his thought, logically. Yes he is. Paul comes to this knowledge of God and comes to God, knowing us, which is ~~knowing~~ more important than anything. Because when we know God and when we are known of God, then we're not stuck up on our knowledge and that's the source of real love and that's the source of human relationships - is knowing God or being known BY God.

That's the center of the Xtn life. It's rooted in God. And It's rooted in God loving us and our responding to that love and that really gives us knowledge. A man doesn't know anything except he is taught of God and unless he is rooted in the Lord and in fellowship with God. If he does, it's dangerous. It really is.

V. 4 (read) Paul says 'we know this.' Of course the Jews knew this and their fundamental creed was 'Shamah'. In Deut. 6: 4 which I think we've recently studied in S. S. at large, which begins by saying 'hear, Oh Israel, thy God is one God' and that was the basic doctrinal statement of Judaism. And, of course, of Xtnity. Paul says 'we know that there are not all these gods that they're sacrificing to - we know there's but one God'. Paul says 'I know that, you know that - you, who are enlightened'.

V. 5 (read) and V. 6: Paul says 'I know this'; 'you know this, you who are strong'.

V. 7 (read) Paul says 'we know it' but everyone doesn't have the knowledge that we have. There's not that knowledge.

V. 8 (read) 'commendeth us' (or does not bring us near to God) he's saying meat within itself is not a moral issue; it's amoral. He's saying meat within itself is not a moral issue; it's amoral. But meat, he says, does not bring us near to God, for neither if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse'. And there are many things that are in the category of just being amoral. He said the meat within itself, is not a moral issue. It's the way the people LOOK at the eating of the meat. But he says in

V. 9 (read) 'lest this liberty of yours become a 'proscoma' a stumbling block or a stone in the pathway to them that are weak. He says 'now whether you eat or whether you don't eat, it's not really a moral issue BUT it could be a stone in the pathway of your brother that would make him stumble and fall and lose his faith'. Even though it's not wrong to you, it becomes a serious sin when it ~~hurts~~ hurts your brother, and causes him to fall.

V. 10 (read) 'emboldened' (or encouraged) to eat those things which are offered to idols. He says 'IF the people whose conscious tell them not to do this, see you doing it, they will be encouraged to do it and through thy knowledge, (through thy knowledge of knowing there is no idol and you go on eating) shall the weak brother perish (or be destroyed - and that's speaking of a shipwreck of his faith). He's not discussing Eternal Life; he's discussing the ship-



wreck of a fellow brothers faith because he has been offended and a brother has placed a stumbling block in his life, which he could not overcome.

Now he goes on in the next verse and makes it more serious than a sin against the brother. He says, in

V. 12 (read) of course, Paul knew this so very, very well because you remember on the road to Damascus, Jes. appeared to him and said 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' and he'd never seen Jes. But in persecuting the people of God, he was persecuting Jes. In sinning against a weak brother, and in causing him to lose his faith or his faith to be shipwrecked, the sin is not only against the weak brother; the sin is against Jes. The sin is against the person for whom Christ died and that's why it is so utterly serious. It's against Christ Himself. Because these people belong to Christ.

The weak belong to Christ as well as the strong. Now having pointed this out, Paul gives a testimony as to what he would do. He says

V. 13 (read) 'wherefore' (or therefore) and the word 'offend' is the word 'stumble'. If it's gonna make a shipwreck of his faith, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth'. You actually have the double negative there; which is the strongest ~~the~~ way the Greeks have ever had of expressing the Truth - like when Jes. said in John 10: 28 'I give unto them Eternal Life and they shall never (you've got the same word - they shall not never - it says in the Greek) shall not never perish'. Like in Gal. 5: 16 (read) 'ye shall not (it's umay) ye shall not never'.

In the N. T., when they wanted to say something emphatically and dogmatically, and as strongly as possible, they used a double negative. We can't do it in English. Paul said 'therefore, if meat make my brother to stumble, I will eat - (I will not never is what it says) - eat any flesh (the Greek literally says 'unto the ages of the ages'. But this is a pretty good translation here, in the KJV) while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend'. Or

to stumble. Now this raises a very important question. It raises an important question for me; it raises an important question for you. It raises an important question for the internal life of a fellowship. Especially where so many people are being saved; where so many young Xtns and weak Xtns and relatively uninstructed Xtns are coming into the fellowship. What is a stumbling block?

What IS a stumbling block? In Corinth, it was the social practice, commonly accepted, of eating meat that had been offered to idols. It was something that was serious enough that it made shipwreck of a weak brothers faith. Until it knocked him out of the battle, destroyed his life. It destroyed his life for the Lord. Probably quit church, he quit reading his Bible; he had no use for the things of God. His life was thrown in destruction. And if the soul was saved, it was saved as by fire. But his life was shipwrecked.

Now, in our day, what is a stumbling block? When we speak of stumbling block, we think of something greater than disappointment. I think we all get disappointed in each other to some degree, because none of us are perfect and if we get close enough to each other, we may get disappointed. And sometimes, we can get sorely disappointed. But that would not necessarily shipwreck the faith and we're not talking about that. We're talking about something more serious.

And it would not be just a disagreement with another. And it would not be, say, a criticism of another. It could not be things in this area. But it is something that we recognize as really being a stone in the path, which is just what this word 'proscoma' means - a stone in the path over which the weak brother cannot get over. He's just floored! He's just knocked to the ground. His life is shipwrecked. Well, let me illustrate: I don't think that any of us would think that bowling would be a stone in the pathway. I don't believe this is a social problem or a Spiritual question in this community.

but we have a man coming to speak to Deacon/Yokefellows in September; his name is Jerry Vines,

who told me that he went to a church and he said in that community that bowling was just regarded as a very worldly thing and a great sin. He was a - he said 'I was an avid bowler'. But he said 'for four years, I could not bowl because of the attitude of the people'. Stumblin blocks change from place to place. Now I served a church one time that if the pastor of that church was seen mowing his lawn with his top - without a shirt - that was very offensive.

Now when I left the church a Yankee, Bro. Al Childers, I was in Greenboro; you were in Taylorsville; I was in Greensboro, a Yankee came and pastored that church. I was in the Seminary during these years and occasionally I would run in to some of them and I would say 'well, how is everything?' you know. And they told me 'you know our pastor did one of the most outrageous things!' And I said 'what was it?' They said 'he was mowing his yard without a shirt and his top was exposed and there was an automobile accident down on Summit Avenue (that is one of the main avenues in Greensboro) and he rushed down there and a lot of the members rushed and they saw him in the crowd.'

And they said 'now you would never have been caught dead like that' and this was a problem. Now I was close enough to the brother and I actually shared this with him. I said 'this may not be significant to you, but people have shared it with me and I think, brother to brother, I should just tell you that it has caused them tremendous sorrow and they felt you were worldly'. Now, Charles Spurgeon, I hate to tell you this, because you're not supposed to smoke. Thou shalt not smoke! Haven't you read that commandment. We'll come back to that in a few moments. And thou shalt not dip and thou shalt not do a lot of things! You who dip, I don't wanna leave you out!

But he smoked and more people have read his books than any man since St. Augustin, they tell us. He preached to five thousand people every time they met. He smoked and people said 'now, Spurgeon, you ought not do this'. Spurgeon said 'well, this is my business'. And he was strong-willed. But one day he was walking down the streets of London and he noticed in a window, in a tobacco place a sign which read like this: 'This is the Brand of Tobacco Spurgeon smokes'. And when he saw it, he said 'I can never smoke again'. Stumbling block!

I used to have a neighbor - Doris and I had a very wonderful neighbor. She really - she was weak. She's in Heaven - no question about it. No one ever loved us more; no one ever showed more compassion. She helped us rear our children; she did everything for us; but she could not accept television. She did not see it as amoral, but it was immoral to her. Now to me, television is amoral. What do I mean by that? I mean it's neither moral nor immoral. It's what you do with it.

But not to her. Some things that are amoral to us are immoral to others. I could not, in clear conscious, that would have been a stone that she could never have got over. It would have just - because she had a lot of confidence in us and she said this so much that I've gone back there, in recent years, and ~~fixes~~ preached her husbands funeral, who was 92 years old. Went to Greensboro - guess you knew the Pinkertons for they were a family there and been there for a hundred years.

I went there - we simply never as long as we were in that city - did we buy a television. Say 'well, that's going too far'. Not in this case. I don't think it is going too far. Someone asked me the question 'what would you do if someone said it offends me for you to drink pepsi-cola?' Someone asked me that. I said 'well, I do not believe that's a legitimate stumbling block. And I cannot believe that would be. But IF I was convinced that that was a stone in the path that would wreck somebody's faith, I would certainly go to 7-Ups or cokes or something like that'. I wouldn't do this - drink the pepsi.

Now, there are many, many things - there are three tests that we can apply and we need to apply them all the time, to see whether a thing is wrong or not.

FIRST: It's Wrong if it is Expressly Forbidden in Scrip. If it's forbidden in Holy Scrip., it's wrong. Some things we do not have to debate over it - adultery is always wrong; lying's always wrong; pornographic movie is always wrong; pornographic literature is always wrong - you don't need to debate that. The Bible has spoken on that. Those things forbidden in Holy Scrip. But there's a second area; not only the things which are specifically



legislated against in Scrip. but

SECOND: Those Which Violate the Truth Principle subscription(?) are wrong. Truth Principles. Now for instance, somebody will say 'well, it doesn't say in the Bible that you're not to smoke. It doesn't say that you're not to dance'. Sin is either forbidden or it's forbidden by Truth Principle. The Bible says that the body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost. Its' not to be defiled by tobacco, alcohol -- it's wrong to engage in dancing that incites emotions and leads to sin. That's clearly covered in the Bible.

But some people stop here. They stop here. Their pride and their rebellion will not bring them to humility to their brothers. The next question is:

*Stumbling Block*

THIRD: Will It Be A ~~Stone~~ in the Pathway of My Weak Brother? That's the third test. Is it a stumbling block to my weak brother? This was the case of the television. This was the case of the bowling. This is the case of many, many things, that people do. I had a professor in preaching who was a Scotsman. He said the most amazing thing that he discovered when he came to America, or came to Durham, N. C. (that's where I was studying - in Duke University) was to discover that Baptists and Methodist preachers considered it a great sin to take a drink.

He said I was brought up in a pretty rigid, Scottish home, I was taught the catechism, the Ten Commandments and he said very puritanical 'we saw no harm at all, in taking a drink' and he said 'it is NO harm for me to take a drink'. Did you know there are some people in the world and it'll be hard to prove they're not Xtians, who say 'I can take a drink'. But he said to us in class 'I wouldn't take a drink, but it's not because it's forbidden in Scrip. and it's not because it's a Truth Principle, as I see it. But there is something that says I ~~can't~~ cannot take a drink in Durham, N. C. I certainly can't, as long as I'm on this theological faculty, teaching you men, because you even preach in your congregation it's wrong'.

He says 'to you, it's a stumbling block and I cannot take even a drink'. So, in our lives,



there will be, if there hasn't already been (I think there has been in most of our lives) there will be that test of whether or not we're going to humble our hearts and whether we really care enough about the weak brother. Now I don't know - I was thinking today - I just can't conceive of anything that would make shipwreck of my faith. I asked another person and the person expressed something but what they expressed to me was a disappointment. I said 'that's not a stumbling block' because the person described to me an attitude in a certain person and they said 'that this is a - this just bothers me'.

But I said 'but this is not a stumbling block. It doesn't wreck your faith, it doesn't wound your conscious, does it?' 'No'. I said 'well, that's disappointment. That is not a stumbling block.' I do not know and I don't know how you look at it tonight, as you look at your life and you think, I don't know. But I do know this: that there are people right here tonight that have to be strengthened in the faith. I know I have a responsibility. I happen to know that if I were to get in business, that if I were to get in a side business, that it would be a stumbling block to some people in this congregation.

They've told me enough 'if I got involved in a commercial pursuit' -people have said that much to me. I could not do this. Some preachers say they can do this; that's their business. There simply is not - there is a feeling against that in this congregation. But whatever it is, we need to be mindful that people are watching us and while we cannot please everyone, and there are some things that may offend, but I do not believe that in anything in the realm of Truth that God is leading us to do, that we must do it, ~~that we must do it, that we must do it~~  
~~that we must do it, that we must do it~~ even though someone takes exception. I do not believe that that will ultimately be a stumbling block. I don't think it will be.

But I believe that we need to be very, very ~~careful~~ conscious and think of the people we're thrown with; people we work with; the people who are watching us and be sure that there's not a stumbling stone in our lives. We had a man in our church in Memphis; he was a wealthy man. And there was some young Xtns working for him. They came to me with the story that this man

used bad language on the job. They said 'this is really a stumbling block to us because this man is a leader in our church and we just cannot accept this.' I called this man in and I just told him I thought I had to share this with him. And he said to me 'I really see how serious this is. I'd never thought of this and nobody has ever told me this. No pastor has ever talked to me about this. I didn't know this'.

And, though he WAS the wealthiest man in the church, and was a man of great wealth, he came before our church and asked forgiveness. It's a serious thing and it can happen in a body and I hear encouraging reports about the witness of our people out yonder. But I tell you, great damage can be done to the cause of Christ and to individual souls, as they look at us and say that we're Xtns. We need to watch our lives and sometimes we have to do things we don't want to do. I think that God will give us grace to do it and I don't think there's any price too great to pay for souls.

Let's keep it in mind. Ask yourself the question 'is there something in my life that really is a stone in the path of someone that would make them fall'? I believe a Xtns life is a stepping stone, effective for weak Xtns. Or it's a stumbling block and the Bible, of course, points out that if we especially put a stumbling stone in the path of a little one - and I don't believe that just means a person in the nursery ~~XXXXXX~~ or elementary - great is the judgment. It is very, very serious to do this.

I have known some people whose faith was wrecked by older Xtns. There's a lot for us to think about. I don't believe there's anyone here tonight who would really want to do this, but I think we need to examine our hearts and I hope that you'll do it.