

8:1: *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth.*

The expression “*now concerning*” (“*Now as touching*,” KJV) is found in other parts of this letter (7:1; 12:1; 16:12). Paul often used these words to introduce a new subject as well as answer the Corinthians’ questions. The subject addressed in this chapter involves “*things offered unto idols*.” To fully appreciate the thought, readers should compare this verse with 10:28. In this second reference Paul also spoke about *things offered to idols*, but he used a word that is different from the term here in 8:1 (at least most manuscripts have a different term). The word used in 10:28 (*hierothutos*) was how pagans described their sacrifices (they viewed them as “sacred offerings”). Here in 8:1, Paul used a different word (*eidolothutos*) that attaches no significance to the pagan deity or to the sacrifice. It simply means a sacrifice was offered. Thayer (p. 174) definition for the word in 8:1 is “the flesh left over from the heathen sacrifices.” For other places where this latter term occurs in this book see verses 4, 7, 10; 10:19; 10:28.

The world had one way to describe pagan sacrifices (they used the word in 10:28 to denote honor and respect) while Christians had another term. Both Paul and the Corinthians knew “being religious” is not enough. God requires people to be *religiously right*. We must serve the one God in the right way. Many claim that such a view about God negates grace, but Paul said (Gal. 1:6) that such is not true. God has made salvation available to those who seek Him and Him alone and those who serve Him in the one way He has described. Our opportunity to know and serve the only true God is a great demonstration of grace. Saying there is “another gospel” that can be followed, or there is another deity that can be honored, is a perversion of grace (Gal. 1:7) and places people under a divine curse (Gal. 1:9).

Knowing that Paul used two different words for sacrifices also tells us the Corinthians were not asking about dietary concerns. Rather, the term used in this verse indicates they recognized that idols were powerless, but they still wanted to know if they could eat meat offered to false gods. It was common at social events and gatherings in this culture to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols, so this was a very logical and important question. It seems the Christians wanted a clear “yes or no” answer on this point, but Paul used much of this letter to say this decision was a matter of Christian liberty (individual choice). It was not a “black and white” matter like lying, stealing and adultery.

In the middle of this verse Paul said, “*we know*.” In this chapter there are two words for *know*. One word is “*oida*” and the second term is “*ginosko*.” *Oida* is used here and it described the possession of knowledge: complete and final knowledge. It is direct and intuitive knowledge. *Ginosko* has the opposite characteristics. Instead of being associated with the possession of knowledge, *ginosko* meant to “acquire” knowledge. It was associated with incomplete and developing knowledge. It described knowledge obtained by experience, instruction and observation. To summarize, *oida* meant “I know” and *ginosko* meant “I come to know, I learn, I ascertain.”

A passage showing the distinction between these two words is Jn. 8:55. Jesus said, “Ye have not *known* (*ginosko*) him; but I *know* (*oida*) him.” This meant the people had not acquired knowledge of God (which would have come through the Scriptures), but Jesus had *complete and full knowledge of the Father*. Jesus had been in the “bosom of the Father” (Jn. 1:18). These two words are also found in Jn. 13:7, but in this passage they are reversed. The word *ginosko* is first and *oida* is second. Another place where these words are found is Mk. 4:13. The first *know* is *oida* and the second *know* is *ginosko*.

When Paul said in 1 Cor. 8:1, “*we know that we all have knowledge*,” he used *oida* (the word for complete knowledge). It seems Paul was quoting the Corinthians. If this is correct, the Corinthians were saying, *we have all knowledge*. Their boast is even more dramatic by Paul’s use of a perfect tense verb (“we had all knowledge in the past and we continue to have that complete knowledge”). Perhaps their boasting was due to their many spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 13:2; 14:19). Paul rebuked their pride and boasting with these words: “*knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth*.”

The word translated *puffeth up* (*phusioo*) is found only seven times in the New Testament and six of the places are in this letter (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; here; 13:4). More information about this term can be found in the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:4 (in the present verse it is a present tense verb). The word *edifieth* (*oikodomeo*) often described the erection of a structure. It first occurs in Mt. 7:24, 26 (Jesus used it to

describe the man who “built” his house upon the rock). He also used this term in Mt. 16:18 (Jesus *built* His church). Paul used it later in this chapter (verse 10) as well as 10:23; 14:4, 17. Here the word is a present tense verb and it means the members of Christ’s church are to be continuously *edified* (built up). At the root of this effort was and is love.

Even if the Corinthians did have all knowledge, facts alone were not enough. Knowledge must be accompanied by “love” (in the Greek text this word for love is *agape*). If Christians ate idol meat, and they knew this action bothered some fellow Christians, they were guilty of sin. Being inconsiderate of how fellow Christians regarded this practice was wrong. Throughout this letter we find demonstrations of how the Corinthians failed to show true love (compare 13:1-8, 13; 14:1; 16:14). In 1 Cor. 13:2, Paul said that without love a person is “nothing.”

When others have or believe they possess superior knowledge, they are often arrogant (think of a balloon being continually inflated). A person who is puffed up with knowledge fails to demonstrate the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The Bible praises knowledge and instructs Christians to get it (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18), but knowledge must be used in love (compare Eph. 4:15, 29). Paul “did not reject the importance of sound doctrine and knowledge in the things of Christ. He asserted that knowledge is not a good thing in and of itself. Knowledge can result in humility and love, but often it produces unsympathetic arrogance. In a word, knowledge—even of holy things—is not all that Christians must pursue” (Holman, 7:134).

8:2-3: *If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything, he knoweth not yet as he ought to know; 3 but if any man loveth God, the same is known by him.*

These verses are easily related to the previous material. Corinth was a pagan city and at least some of the converts had come from an idolatrous background. Some of the Christians who had formerly worshipped idols and eaten the sacrifices were now uncomfortable about eating part of the leftover sacrifices or being in a social setting where idol meat was served (these brethren may not have wanted anything to do with their former way of life). This concern about having any type of association with their sinful past shows how seriously first century Christians viewed their conversion. When they became a “new creature in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17), they wanted nothing to do with their former and sinful past. On the other hand, there were Christians who did not object to eating what had been sacrificed to idols. In these two verses Paul spoke to Christians who had *no objection* to eating idol meat.

The second verse begins with “*If any man thinketh that he knoweth anything.*” *Knoweth* is a perfect tense verb (this tense means a person had learned something in the past and had not forgotten it). As stated in the commentary on verse 1, two different words for “know” are used in this chapter. Here we are not sure which term is correct due to a manuscript variation. Some manuscripts have “*oida*” and others have “*ginosko*.” While the manuscripts do not agree on which word is right, they do agree on the tense (*know* is a *perfect tense* verb). In the past the Corinthians had learned idols were powerless (verse 4) and they still possessed this knowledge when Paul wrote this letter (they had not forgotten this teaching).

Though some knew full well that idols are nothing, Paul added, “*he knoweth not yet as he ought to know*” (2b). This clarifies the thought. People had the right knowledge about idols and the sacrifices to them, but they lacked a proper attitude. The knowledge possessed by these Christians was to be combined with love (verse 3). What we see in verse 2 is the attitude of an “arrogant expert.” A person may have mastered a subject so thoroughly they believe they know everything there is to know about the matter. Such an attitude usually leads to pride.

We are not given the details about what the Corinthians were doing, but one wonders if some of them were not taking every opportunity to show contempt for idols and idolatry (compare verse 10). MacKnight (p. 167) suggested, “they made no difference between an idol’s temple and a common house, nor between a feast on the sacrifice and an ordinary meal, but freely joined the heathens in partaking of these sacrifices as common food in the idol’s temple.” Behavior such as this was troubling to at least some fellow Christians (verse 7).

Even if a person is thoroughly acquainted with one subject, there are other matters wherein he is not

very knowledgeable. This is certainly true with Christianity. A person may know a great deal about one or more Bible subjects, but some topics are not fully understood. Because no Christian is an expert in everything related to the Bible, it is unwise and sinful to boast. “The ‘assumption of omniscience’ is obnoxious in any person. In the Christian such an assumption is contrary to humility and love as well as ruinous in the area of personal influence. For one to have supreme confidence in his knowledge means that he thinks he knows things perfectly ‘as to nature, consequence, and personal duty and relations’” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:390). Verse 2 also serves as a rebuke to every Christian (especially preachers) who eventually quit studying the Bible because they “know so much.” Some men study long enough to get a sufficient number of sermons and then literally stop studying. When it comes to the word of God, there is always more to learn.

When Christians “love” others (this is a present tense verb) and they blend this with knowledge (verse 3), they are “*known by Him*” (God). True Christianity cannot have love without knowledge or knowledge without love (both must be combined). The consequence of joining love and knowledge is being “*known by Him*” (God). Verse 3 affirms in the strongest possible terms that a person cannot have a relationship with God without love. Such was an essential message for the Corinthians because they had elevated knowledge over love and in many respects eliminated love from their Christian life (compare 1 Jn. 5:1-3).

At the end of verse 3 Paul said, *known by Him* instead of “we know God.” This expression is also used in the Galatian letter (4:9), and in both places it describes redemption (salvation). It means we have God’s favor, approval and love (see how this idea is expressed negatively in Mt. 7:23). If we want eternity with God, God must love us first. This has been done (Jn. 3:16). We must now respond in love (3a) so God will love us as one of His children (3b). Unlike a relationship a ruler has with a nation (all Americans *know* the President, but the President does not personally know each American), the Godhead personally knows each Christian. God knows in the most intimate way all who belong to Him (Jn. 10:14; 2 Tim. 2:19).

When we express love to others, especially Christians, verse 3 indicates God has an increased interest in us. Love is the golden chain that binds us together with God. Having love and combining it with knowledge is absolutely essential (2b). Paul indicated this with the word “*ought*.” This term (*dei*) means “an unconditional necessity” and a “divine decree” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:279). Love and knowledge are not optional—both must be possessed and practiced to please God. The problem at Corinth was not really a question of knowledge. It was a question of love. Eating idol meat was a matter personal judgment that was really answered by agape love. Today there are also many matters of judgment (non-doctrinal issues) and these subjects require us to emphasize love over knowledge.

8:4: *Concerning therefore the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is (anything) in the world, and that there is no God but one.*

As stated in the commentary on verse 1, there are two words for “know” in this chapter and it is important to distinguish between them. Here *know* is *oida*, a word describing full and complete knowledge. Once again Paul reminded these Christians that they knew the facts about idols. They had come to the conclusion that idols are “*nothing*” and there is only “*one God*.” An idol “is a nonentity. An idol is an *it*, not a *him* or *her*. Idols are not living personalities. They are inanimate objects, made of wood, stone, or metal, to which deceived people have ascribed personality” (Gromacki, p. 103).

“*Things sacrificed to idols*” comes from a single term (*eidolothutos*). As explained in the commentary on verse 1 where this word is also used, this word described pagan sacrifices and it attached no honor to pagan deities. It was merely a descriptive word to describe what was done by idol worshippers. Paul meant, “The gods others speak of are *nothing*. They do not exist. We know beyond any doubt they are false and powerless” (compare 1 Cor. 12:2). The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:840) noted how the existence of idols is denied, but “not absolutely.” Idols have “no real place...no power over the elements of nature...there is no Zeus in the sky, nor Poseidon ruling the sea, but ‘one God and Father’” (ibid). Christians like Paul had helped people realize the truth about superstition and idolatry and Christians today have this same obligation.

At the end of this verse Paul affirmed the existence of only *one God*. While there are those who believe in other gods and think idols have power, there is only *one God*. Men may construct an image of a god, but the image is meaningless (Ps. 115:4-8). The one God is an eternal being who created all things (Gen. 1:1) and has revealed Himself through the Scriptures. In the information He has given we are told the one God is comprised of a “*Godhead*” (Acts 17:29, KJV). There is the *Father* (verse 6), the *Lord Jesus Christ* (verse 6), and the Holy Spirit (12:3).

When discussing the subject of idolatry, readers may also wonder about the occult as Paul listed idolatry and witchcraft together in Gal. 5:19. Is there a connection between these two things? Since 1 Cor. 8:4 says there is no power in idolatry, is there any power in sorcery and the occult? The Old Testament writers “did not see a connection between magic and the gods. Foreign magicians in Scripture did not invoke help of their gods for magical formulas, but often called upon self-operating forces that were independent of the gods (Isa. 47:13; the monotheistic Israelites did not accept the existence of the foreign gods). Moreover, the biblical writers seemed to attribute a reality to magical power that it did not ascribe to the gods. Magic was considered human rebellion that unlocked divine secrets, making humanity equal with God” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 502).

We live in a different culture; while it also may not necessarily associate idolatry with the occult, both of these topics are important for Christians to know about and understand. What about things like fortune-telling, mind-reading, ESP, and Ouija boards? During World War I there was a significant rise in the sales of Ouija boards. Other activities associated with Satanism and witchcraft are commonplace. At least 20 different forms of occult activity can be found, and Christians are sometimes faced with questions about these subjects, just as Paul had to answer questions about idols. Even Christians want to know if there is “power” available from or through Satan and the occult. Is there any truth to things like “black magic”?

A good beginning point is to draw a distinction between modern “magicians” and the “magic” condemned in the Bible. In the Bible “magicians” were people involved with the occult or pseudo-occult practices. Modern magicians entertain with tricks based on sleight of hand and/or illusion and there is nothing sinful about their actions. In fact, modern magicians used to be called “jugglers” because of how skillfully they manipulate things with their hands.

Modern magicians divide their trade into three categories, the first of which are “*puzzler*” tricks (these actions deceive the eye). A second category is the “*fooler*” (tricks in this category fool both the eye and mind. One fooler trick is producing a live dove from a silk handkerchief). Other tricks are in the “*baffler*” category (this is the level sought by professional magicians). One baffler trick is making a table levitate. Sometimes magicians have made a table rise by strapping a ruler underneath a forearm. Then, while placing their hands on top of the table, they slipped the ruler underneath the table’s edge. As they raised their hands the table rose (levitation is just a matter of camouflaging the support). Other baffler tricks are far more advanced, including one where an entertainer takes a large knife, draws it across his thumb, and blood immediately begins to flow. Then a “magic Band-aid” (a cotton ball) is placed upon the wound and the severe cut is instantly “healed.” The secret to this trick is secretly pricking the skin just behind a fingernail so blood will come forth when pressure is applied. A large knife is then held in the opposite hand and drawn across the thumb. It pulls blood from the pricked skin and leaves the impression of a thumb actually being cut. When the blood is wiped away with the cotton ball, an “instant healing” occurs.

Professional tricks are so good people may believe the feats require super-human power. Magicians do not have any real power; they use tricks. Such is even true for voodoo (this is based on the “power of suggestion”). Some critical thinking would help people realize that what seems to be supernatural is not. For example, if there is really supernatural power, why do we never see someone with a problem like a withered arm healed? Why don’t Ouija-board “readers” use blindfolds? Why don’t “Psychic Surgeons” perform their work in the dark? Why don’t “Fire-Walkers” walk in a hot furnace or flames like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Why do they walk just a few feet and take only a few steps? Why not hold hot coals in their hands for a solid hour? Good magicians know how to fool an audience. In the case of Fire-Walkers, the power of suggestion makes it possible for a person’s body to be immune to pain for a short period of time.

We may not know the exact methods professional magicians use, but we can know the principles that

allow them and others to draw crowds and impress people. Tarot cards are just one example. A person familiar with these cards can use them to “give a reading” by observing how people in the room react. For instance, a card reader might say, “Someone in the room has a friend who is ill.” When a person nods their head or gasps in amazement, the reader knows he has hit “pay dirt” and can use other subtle clues from that person or group to continue the reading. Some are experts in “muscle reading” (mentalists use this ability to “read” their audiences. This technique is based on subconscious reactions to circumstances and environment). In some cases a Tarot card reader may have secretly obtained prior knowledge about a person and will use that knowledge in the “reading.” Quick thinking (the ability to quickly steer away from wrong guesses and suggest something else) also helps Tarot card readers. Understanding human nature is a key tactic for this practice as well as “luck.”

If a 60 year old person comes in for a reading and is told he or she has a “sick friend,” the odds of that being true are very high. Some things can be guessed. A similar thing is true for “dowsers” (people who can find water using a forked branch from a tree). When a person walks through an area seeking water, the tip of their rod dips down when water is located. What people do not realize is that dowsers are usually very good at picking up subconscious clues that indicate the presence of water. They may notice naturally absorbent substratum and subsoil, the growth of vegetation, the temperature of the surrounding air, the smell of damp earth, ground vibrations due to an underground water source, and there may be an underground stream that can be heard with the ear. All these subconscious clues lead to an ideomotor action (i.e. the dipping of the divining rod).

If magicians were limited to having objects up their sleeves, mirrors, and trapdoors, their profession would have passed away into oblivion many years ago. These men (and women) are masters at deception, and it is a type of deception people do not expect. For instance, think about the men from Pharaoh’s court described in Ex. 7:11-12. How did the Egyptian sorcerers “cast down a rod” and it became a serpent? This author has come to the conclusion it was not by supernatural power. At least one type of snake (the Egyptian Cobra) can be put into a catalepsy (a rigid and stiff position). This is done by pinching the nape of the snake’s neck. When released, what seems to be a “rod” (i.e. the stiff snake) changes into a moving serpent. Modern magicians have changed a “cane into a flower” or handkerchief, so the type of trick in Ex. 7 was hardly impossible for people. Furthermore, since Pharaoh “called” for these men (Ex. 7:11), they had a little time to make things ready for their performance. Notice also from Ex. 7-8 that some “advance notice” was given to Pharaoh about turning the river to blood and the plague of frogs. Both of these feats were duplicated, but no advance warning was given about the lice (Ex. 8:16) and this plague was not copied.

Common techniques used by magicians and others seeking to trick or deceive people (and this includes members of the Pentecostal movement) include sleight of hand, psychological principles, stooges, unseen and unknown devices, mathematical principles (physics beings one example), physical deception, optical illusion, luck and probability, and a combination of these things.

One of the things taught in the Old Testament is avoiding the occult (Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6; 1 Sam. 28:9; Isa. 8:19; 44:25; 57:3; Jer. 27:9; Ezek. 22:28; Mic. 5:12; Nah. 3:4; Mal. 3:5). Those who practiced divination were to be killed (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 18:10-11). Death was an appropriate punishment for this type of activity as it was a direct challenge to God’s power. In spite of the occult being off-limits, it attracted scores of people. “The widespread practice of the magical arts in Bible times may be comprehended from the fact that scripture alone refers to their being practiced in Egypt (Ex. 7:11), Babylon (Ezek. 21:21), Assyria (II Kings 17:17), Chaldea (Dan. 5:11), Canaan (Deut. 18:14, 21), Proconsular Asia (Acts 19:13, 19), and Macedonia (Acts 16:16)” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 336). Babylon was especially notorious for occult traffic (Dan. 1:20; 2:2, 27; 4:7, 9; 5:11). Satan and human beings do not now have the power to engage in supernatural signs (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 13:10 for the termination of miracles), but this does not stop him and others from being involved with deceit. Satan is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44), and people use deception to carry out their goals (compare Jer. 27:9-10).

Based on all the preceding information we may ask a final question. What about demon possession? It seems demon possession was allowed for three reasons in first century times. First, it demonstrated the

power of Jesus and His apostles over Satan and his demonic helpers. By casting out demons Jesus and the apostles showed who had the greater power (compare Mt. 9:33; 12:22-23; Acts 19:11-20). A second reason for giving demons some freedom to possess people in first century times was so Jesus could answer the only true objection made about His miracles (i.e. He worked His signs by Satan's power). Jesus proved His miracles were not from Satan by a single argument (Mk. 3:23-27). Since His powers were not from the devil, the only other source (deity) was obvious. A third reason for allowing demonic possession was to demonstrate once and for all the existence of evil, and to show that evil is not abstract and impersonal. It is real as well as personal. God has literally given us a view of our adversary (compare Eph. 6:12).

Demon possession no longer exists because it would require supernatural power to overcome it and the Bible teaches the age of the miraculous is forever gone (see the commentary on 1 Cor. 13). If demons are in people today, but God has withdrawn the power to cast them out, man has an enemy he cannot defeat, and God may be accused of being unloving as well inconsistent (1 Jn. 4:4). Miracles were to "confirm the word" (Mk. 16:20; Jn. 20:30-31; Heb. 2:2-4). We now have the word confirmed (Jude 3), so the miraculous things (including demon possession) are gone.

In a book called "The Fakers" (Baker Book House, 1980), Paul Meier, a M.D., said he "began an extensive study of demonology while still in medical school, because I decided to go into psychiatry. I thought I would have to differentiate between patients with psychological conflicts and demon possessed individuals. I have studied every Bible passage that has anything to do with demonic activity. I have spent hours talking to missionaries from various countries. I read books on demonology, most of which are naively dramatic. I even attended a conference on demonology at Notre Dame, attended by Christian psychiatrists, seminary professors, and missionaries from all over the world. After years of studying demonology and looking for demon possession in my thousands of patients, I can honestly say that I have never yet seen a single case of demon possession" (p. 161). "I have had hundreds of patients who came to see me because they thought they were demon possessed. Scores of them heard 'demon voices' telling them evil things to do. It was at first surprising to me that all of these had dopamine deficiencies in their brains, which were readily correctable with Thorazine or any other major tranquilizer. I discovered that all of the 'demons' I was seeing were allergic to Thorazine and that, in nearly every case, a week or two on Thorazine made the 'demons' go away and brought the patient closer to his real conflicts. These demons were merely auditory hallucinations" (p. 162). A final point from Meier (p. 164) is also important. "I usually won't even allow delusional patients to read their Bibles while still delusional, because I am afraid they will misapply Scripture. I have known delusional patients who have read 'if your eye offends you, pluck it out' in the Bible and have actually plucked their eyes out, or cut off their sexual organs, and so forth. When they come back to reality through medication, however, the Bible can become a real healing tool in their lives if it is applied the way God intended it to be applied."

Paul's claim that idols are powerless is again stated in 1 Cor. 10:19, but in this later chapter an additional point is made. In 10:20 he said idols are a front (mask) for Satan and his helpers (this point is also made in the Old Testament, Deut. 32:16-17. Compare, too, Rev. 9:20). While it is true that "*greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world*" (1 Jn. 4:4) and the devil will flee if we resist him (Jas. 4:7), it is also true that Christians should not be closely attached to idols or anything associated with the occult.

A final point about idolatry must be made. Whenever a person worships anything other than God, he is guilty of idolatry and therefore associated with Satan. A man who worships money or possessions is just as much an idolater as someone who bows before a statue, since both are serving something other than God (Col. 3:5). Idolatry comes in many forms and it is one of Satan's temptations (Mt. 6:13) and "darts" (Eph. 6:16). Thus, all need God's spiritual armor (Eph. 6:11-18).

8:5: *For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many;*

Not everyone in the first century shared Paul's belief in *one God* (verse 4). The apostle knew others

believed in “*gods*” and may have argued with him about the existence of other deities (“*there be that are called gods*”). In the original text Paul used a rare conjunction (*eiper*) that meant “if indeed, if after all” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 411). This means Paul spoke in a “concessive sense” (ibid). Stated another way, Paul acknowledged the existence of pagan gods but did not attribute any power to them. Paul also recognized that people believed in “*lords*.” We do not know why Paul used two different terms to describe false gods. Was there a distinction between *gods* and *lords*? Perhaps in heathen thought *gods* were superior to the *lords* in their status and/or reign. Or, perhaps it was believed *gods* reigned over the heavens (e.g. Jupiter, Juno, Mercury) and *lords* ruled over the earth (Neptune and Ceres would be possible examples). An interesting cross-reference is Deut. 10:17.

A study of ancient cultures shows that people had a deity for nearly everything in existence (the sun, moon, stars, forests, rivers, seas, mountains, insects, birds, animals, etc.). Many nations had their “chief god” and then added other deities as they felt necessary (notice that “*many*” is used twice at the end of this verse). Although some who lived in the first century believed in false gods, Paul made the Christian’s position very clear in verse 6. He said, “*yet to us there is one God, the Father...and one Lord, Jesus Christ.*” The Christian belief is definite and dogmatic. We recognize only one true deity (the God of the Bible) and look to the Scriptures for heavenly guidance and proper worship.

It is interesting that members of the Mormon faith have used this verse to support their view of there being many gods. If members of this faith only examined the immediate context of the thought (verses 4-6), they would realize this passage does not support their doctrine. Rather than lift a single verse out of its context, the Bible must be studied in its immediate and remote context. Readers must see what immediately precedes and follows a verse, as well as consult the rest of the Scriptures when drawing conclusions.

8:6: *yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him.*

Since Paul described the world’s view of deity in verse 5, he now turns to how Christians view deity. Christians regard God as their “*Father.*” *Father* is designed to convey the ideas of guidance, protection, salvation, and help (He is not cold, distant, and uninterested in man). God’s fatherly qualities can certainly be seen in the areas of sin and redemption. Sin severs our relationship with God (Isa. 59:1-2), but God is a loving Father who sent His Son into the world so we could become “rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus thoroughly knows the Father (Jn. 7:29; 8:55; 10:15) and we can know the Father through Him (Jn. 12:45; 14:7, 9; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).

Not all earthly fathers are good (children have had fathers who were unkind and uncaring), but the Heavenly Father is perfect and His work involves “*all things.*” God is the originator of all that exists. Unlike our world, God is uncreated and unoriginated (i.e. eternal). Paul used a preposition (*ek*) that indicates everything is “from” or has come “out of” God. This is in agreement with Gen. 1:1 (God created all that exists). The point is also somewhat similar to Eph. 3:15. If we study our world and compare its environment to other planets, we must conclude God created a wonderful environment for man (Lk. 6:35). Also, since everything came from just one deity, the Corinthians should have realized Christianity is at odds with pagan thinking (the heathens believed the different parts of creation came from different deities).

Because God is our *Father*, we are “*unto him*” (ASV). The KJV has “*in him,*” but the Greek preposition *eis* is better translated *unto*. The idea is that saved people are dedicated to God and destined to serve His purposes (compare Rom. 12:1-2 and Tit. 2:14). Man’s basic purpose in life is to find, know, love and serve God (compare Eccl. 12:13). Since the Father is not the only member of the Godhead (see the commentary on verse 4), it was proper for Paul to add, “*and one Lord, Jesus Christ.*” The Father and the Son are not the same person, but they are so closely united there is only “*one God.*” Verse 6 is very similar to Eph. 4:5-6. What is said in this verse as well as the material in Eph. 4 may have been the basis for some of the first Christian hymns.

The Father is further described by the expression “*of whom are all things*” (i.e. all that exists is

because of the Father—not a single thing has come through pagan deities). He created all things and He accomplished this creation “*through him*” (Jesus). According to Paul, the Father and Son worked together at the time of creation (compare Heb. 1:1-2). After creation their work did not stop. Redemption was planned by the Godhead (even before the creation of the world, Eph. 1:4) and Jesus executed the plan to save man (2 Cor. 8:6b). Then the Holy Spirit helped reveal this plan to the world through the apostles (Jn. 16:13-14). The end of the verse (“*we through Him*”) means sinners are saved, redeemed, and justified by (through) Jesus.

Ultimately all this information was designed to say the God of the Bible cannot be compared to the false gods and lords worshipped by men. “With this kind of knowledge in hand, it is easy to understand why some believers at Corinth did not hesitate to eat food that had been dedicated to idols. As far as they were concerned, these religious ceremonies were insignificant. Paul affirmed this theology and conclusion to a degree. The Corinthians surmised that Christianity’s monotheism precluded the existence of other gods, and thus nullified the significance of the pagan sacrifices” (Holman, 7:136).

8:7: *Howbeit there is not in all men that knowledge: but some, being used until now to the idol, eat as (of) a thing sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.*

In studying this verse it is important to remember the Corinthians believed they “had all knowledge” (verse 1). They thought they knew the truth about idol meat and could therefore eat it without consequence (verse 4). Here Paul said, “Wait a minute. Not everyone is sure about eating this food.” This is expressed as “*Howbeit there is not in all men that knowledge*” (not all were enlightened about this matter). In the middle of verse 7 the ASV says “*used*” to the idol and the KJV says “*with conscience*” of the idol. This difference is due to a manuscript variation. The KJV is based on a word occurring about 30 times in the New Testament (*suneidesis*). If this term is the one Paul intended to use, the idea is “consciousness, awareness” (CBL, GED, 6:189). Spicq (3:335) defined this word as “the interior faculty for the personal discernment of good and evil, the practical rule of conduct and motive for action.”

In the ASV translators selected the other term and rendered it *used*. If this word (*sunetheia*) is right, it means these Christians were “*accustomed to idols*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:306). Aside from here the term accepted by the ASV translators occurs only in Jn. 18:39 and 1 Cor. 11:16. It is a compound word (the prefix means “with” or “together”) and the rest of the word means “custom” or “habit.” When both parts of the word are combined, the full idea is “shared custom” or “shared habit.” Whichever word is right, there is no doubt the Corinthians were very familiar with idols. Idol worshippers believed their gods were real, blessings needed to be sought from them, and their wrath had to be appeased. Having believed these things for many years and then trying to immediately abandon these beliefs after becoming a Christian would have been very difficult (this point is further discussed in the commentary at the end of verse 11).

Since some of these Christians had come to realize idolatry was wrong and had abandoned this way of life (compare 1 Cor. 6:9), at least some of them did not want to be reminded of their former pagan ways. Paul spoke of these brethren at the end of verse 7: “*Their conscience being weak is defiled.*” Here we find two distinct groups at Corinth. One group ate idol meat and thought nothing of it. A second consisted of Christians who were bothered by this practice. Those not comfortable eating this meat are described as being troubled “*until now*” (“*this hour,*” KJV). Since food is a part of daily life, this must have been an on-going issue (if not daily, every week or several times a month). The specific problem at Corinth is described as “*a thing sacrificed to an idol*” (the KJV says “*a thing offered unto an idol*”). This entire expression is translated from a single word (*eidolothutos*) that is also found in verse 1 (see that verse for more information on this term).

Just as all local congregations have on-going problems, such was also true at Corinth concerning the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols. It would have been easy for those who had no objections to this meat to do as they wanted and have no regard for fellow Christians who were troubled by this practice. Hence, later in this book Paul had a lot to say about love. We must consider fellow Christians when making various choices.

Today most Christians will probably not have differences over what is right and wrong to eat, but there will be other issues that involve the principles described in this chapter and throughout this book. We also see in this verse another important truth: After conversion a Christian may carry some “mental baggage” from his former manner of life. One struggle for some Christians is superstition. A child of God may acknowledge only one true God but still be troubled by superstitions. For instance, a Christian may continue to believe “thirteen is an unlucky number,” “breaking a mirror brings bad luck,” a “bee entering a home means a visitor is about to arrive,” “fish should always be eaten from head to tail,” and “a bride's veil protects her from evil spirits who are jealous of happy people.” Knowing the truth is no guarantee a person will always feel comfortable doing what God authorizes him to do. Old beliefs and superstitions often die slowly.

If Christians ate idol meat and believed this was wrong, they violated their conscience (for a discussion of the conscience, see the commentary on 1 Tim. 1:5). Paul said their conscience would be “*defiled*” (pained). This term (*moluno*) is a present tense verb and it is found only here, Rev. 3:4; 14:4. It was often used in Classical Greek to describe soiling or making something dirty by mud or filthiness. Here it means “made to feel guilty, through doing things about which one had scruples” (Brown, 1:449).

In addition to the word *defiled*, Paul referred to the conscience of some Christians as “*being weak*” (present tense). *Weak* (*asthenes*) does not mean these Christians were inferior or less spiritual than others who had no objections to idol meat. Neither is it a derogatory or condescending term. It most certainly does not mean these Christians were *weak* in every other area of the Christian faith. It simply means some brethren did not approve of eating idol meat or being in a place where this food was eaten (on this one subject their conscience was highly sensitive). Hodge (p. 146) said a “*weak* conscience is one which either regards as wrong what is not in fact so; or one which is not clear and decided in its judgments.” These Christians needed to avoid practices that pained their conscience. Such is still true for all Christians today.

8:8: *But food will not commend us to God: neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better.*

Since there were two different viewpoints about idol meat (verse 7), Paul now said the type of food we eat does not matter. In other words, “If we eat idol meat (because we are not bothered by it), that is fine. If we do not eat the meat (because of a conscience problem), that is also fine.” Eating or not eating idol meat was a *neutral* decision. An ancient writer wisely expressed the thought as: “It is true that we will not please God because we eat everything or offend him if we reject some things” (The Church’s Bible, p. 138). Christians were entitled to make a personal choice about the meat based upon their own conscience. As long as God’s people follow their conscience in areas God has not regulated, they please God. If we approve of some things that others do not (and these things must be morally neutral—they are neither good nor bad), we are not superior to or “stronger” than those who are uncomfortable with our decisions. Personal choices in these areas do not make us greater or lesser before God. Instead of being concerned over our decisions on morally neutral matters, God is concerned about how we treat our brethren and whether or not we maintain a good conscience.

The language of the New Testament had more than one word for food. One word (*kreas*) meant animal flesh. Another term (used here in verse 8) was *broma*, a general word for food. Since the general word for food is used, this information applies to all types of food. Today we may not be too concerned about food and Christianity, but there is a principle that has great value. Christians often have different ideas about various things and they need to know how to deal with non-doctrinal differences. One difference involves holidays; “Halloween” is a prime example. We can find Christians who believe Halloween is a day dedicated to the devil and should therefore be shunned by all God-fearing people. Others regard Halloween as a secular holiday and a night of fun. Which view is right?

Halloween likely originated in Britain and Northern Europe; the Druids believed October 31st was when the “Lord of the Dead” (Saman) called forth hosts of evil spirits. Druids lit fires to ward off evil spirits. When Britain was conquered by the Romans, this holiday was added to the Roman harvest festival

(it honored the false and mythological goddess Pomona, the goddess of fruit). Bobbing or dunking for apples can be traced back to this goddess. Other practices associated with Halloween are also steeped in paganism. Ghosts and witches came from the Celts. Carving pumpkins and putting candles (fire) inside them were practices likely passed down from the Celts (it was a way to “scare the spooks”).

Since Halloween has most certainly come from paganism, it is not that much different from the idol meat available to the Corinthians. We can treat Halloween as Paul dealt with the problem at Corinth. This apostle told the Corinthians they could not participate in idol worship (1 Cor. 10:20-21), but it was not wrong to be in contact with things that came from paganism (1 Cor. 8:8—the meat could be eaten). If Halloween is used to honor pagan gods and evil forces, it is wrong. If our involvement with it is not designed to honor any pagan deities (i.e., it is a time for children to have fun), it is a matter of personal judgment. Halloween also becomes wrong for a Christian if it bothers his or her conscience. It can be wrong if the circumstances described in the next two verses occur. If Christians and their children participate in Halloween, wisdom and Christian principles suggest that modest clothing be worn and God’s people avoid any type of “devilish” costume (Satan is the world’s enemy, not a joke). Too, if Christians do observe this day, they do not “trick or treat.” They always observe the golden rule (Mt. 7:12).

“Commend” (*paristemi*) is a present tense verb that meant “come beside.” Here it helps to stress that “food is not able to place the believer before God” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:41). It does not “recommend” us to God. “Worse” (*hustereo*) is also a present tense verb and it meant “be lacking” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:409). “Better” (*perisseuo*) is a present tense verb that meant “be at an advantage” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:77). Obedience and purity in heart bring people close to God, not eating or avoiding certain types of food and avoiding secular holidays.

8:9-10: *But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to the weak. 10 For if a man see thee who hast knowledge sitting at meat in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols?*

The “liberty” (*exousia*) in this context is *the right to eat meat*. It is “Christian freedom, which is limited by the consideration of other people” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:11). Those not bothered by idol meat had the freedom to eat this food, but it could not be partaken of with “heedlessness, stubbornness, and boastful pride” (The Church’s Bible, p. 139). If eating idol meat became a “*stumblingblock to the weak*” (9b), eating the meat was wrong. Thus, Paul issued a warning: “*Take heed*” (*blepo*). This is a present tense verb and it occurs again in 1 Cor. 10:12 where Paul said, “Take heed lest he fall.” While the ASV and KJV translate the word “take heed,” the NKJV says “beware.”

Aside from this passage *stumblingblock* (*proskomma*) occurs only in the book of Romans (Rom. 9:32, 33; 14:13, 20) and 1 Pet. 2:8. Here the word’s meaning is identical to Rom. 14:13, 20 (it describes actions that would bring injury to *weaker* Christians). It is like putting a stone in a person’s path so they stumble and fall (compare 7b). Brown (2:706) said, “Paul expressly forbids the strong to cause the weak to stumble and to hurt their conscience (Rom. 14:13, 21; 1 Cor. 8:9). Their freedom, though justified in itself must not cause others to fall. This is the law of love. He who hurts the conscience of another creates an obstacle for the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:12f., 19f.).”

Christians comfortable eating the idol meat could have harassed and made fun of those who were bothered by it. Differences in judgment over this issue could have caused a power struggle within the congregation. Those who wanted to eat the meat might have said, “Our view is right and it will be eaten. This meat is the least expensive, no sin is associated with it, and **it will be used in our homes and at church fellowships.**” Strong Christians may have claimed “God knew their heart” and they were okay. While God does know what is in the heart, a weak Christian would not have known what was in the mind of a strong Christian. Paul was aware of the potential problems, so he said, “Think about your fellow Christians. Do not make this an issue for either you or them.”

In verse 10 the point turns to an illustration. Paul pictured a Christian who entered an “*idol’s temple*”

(*eidoleion* is the word for temple and this term is found only here). After entering the heathen structure he sat down to eat a meal. The New Living Translation offers this paraphrase: “For if others see you—with your ‘superior knowledge’—eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol?” The word translated “sitting” (*katakeimai*) described someone who was reclining and ready to dine (this word is applied to Jesus in Mk. 2:15). One almost gets the mental image of a person who was very comfortable in such a setting. We do not know if this illustration is hypothetical or it described actual cases. Whether real or not, it suggests Paul had in mind Gentile converts (Jews would have been very reluctant to visit an idol temple). Rienecker and Rogers (p. 412) referred to “invitation cards” found among the papyri (i.e. there were actually invitations to come and dine in an idol’s temple). Virtually everyone but slaves were invited to these functions (Baker Commentary on the Bible, p. 972).

Paul did not specifically address whether or not Christians had divine permission to enter pagan temples and eat. He simply gave an illustration to make a point. Some illustrations in the Bible involve things that are wrong (compare Lk. 16:1-8). While Paul does not say going to pagan temples was wrong, it does not seem he was overly enthused about the idea.

Ancient writers had more than one word to describe temples. One term (*naos*) was respectful (it described the inner part of a temple). A second word (*hieron*, 1 Cor. 9:13) often described the whole temple area. A third term is found here in 1 Cor. 8:10 (*eidoleion*). Thayer (p. 174) defined this word as “an idol’s temple, temple consecrated to idols.” Although this third word for temple is found only once in the New Testament, it is used in other forms (types of speech). Readers can find *eidolothutos*—an adjective, *eidololatrea*—a noun, *eidololatrae*—a noun, and *eidolon*—a noun. It is easy to see how each of these related words is closely related to the English word “idolatry.” Christians have little in common with the worship of false gods.

If a Christian was comfortable entering into a heathen temple and eating a meal, what would happen if he was seen by a fellow Christian who thought such an activity was wrong? This second and weaker brother could very well reason, “If another Christian can go to the house of a false god it must be okay. I will do as he does and eat idol meat.” What we see here is really a form of peer pressure, not knowledge and spiritual confidence (Christians would copy what fellow believers were doing). In fact, the ASV and KJV say the weak Christian’s conscience is “*emboldened*” (the ASV footnote says “*builded up*”). For more information on *emboldened* (*oikodomeo*) see the commentary on 8:1. It is right to “build up” people (1 Thess. 5:11, this passage has the same word), but the *building* in 1 Cor. 8:10 was wrong because it was a negative form of peer pressure. Paul described a Christian who is not comfortable with something, but because the act was done by another church member, he did it too. “You ought to *have built him up* to do good; but you impel him to evil” (Bengel, 2:209). “It seems that the strong and the boastful members of the Corinthian congregation justified their inconsiderate action toward their weaker brethren by saying that they wished ‘to build up’ these brethren and make them strong. Paul asks: ‘Is this the way in which you would build them up?’” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 345). As the remaining three verses show, there are some actions God technically allows us to perform (do), but because they would wound or destroy a fellow Christian, we may need to exercise restraint in some or all cases. For information on “things sacrificed to idols” (*eidolothutos*), see the commentary on verse 1.

8:11: *For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died.*

If a “weak brother” ate the idol meat, a soul “for whose sake Christ died” would “perish.” The word translated *perish* (*apollumi*) is used in other passages to describe death and destruction (Mt. 16:25; Lk. 19:10). Here it means falling from grace, losing one’s salvation, being eternally lost. A person can lose his or her salvation, and in this case part of the blame comes from a Christian’s “thoughtless human action” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:136). “*Is weak*” (*astheneo*) is a present tense verb denoting an extremely tender and easily wounded conscience. It is also found in verses 9 and 12 of this chapter.

Since some of the Corinthian Christians had bragged about their knowledge (8:1), here Paul

sarcastically responded to their claims by saying, “*Your knowledge is very good. It builds up a man to the point where he loses his soul. Because of your example you destroy a child of God.*” The Corinthians needed to realize their actions were affecting people Jesus died to save. Destroying any part of the Lord’s spiritual flock (Acts 20:28) will always be a very bad choice (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Jesus said such a person would fare better by being drowned in the sea (Mt. 18:6).

We can better understand the meaning of this verse if we remember how rampant idolatry was in the ancient world. Idolatry was so common among the general population that statues came in various shapes and sizes. Some were enormous monuments set up on public places of worship. Others, known as “teraphim,” were kept in homes. Idols were even worn on chains around necks. Acts 19:24 shows that in just one place (Ephesus) a silversmith employed “many craftsmen” to manufacture silver shrines to the goddess Diana. Although these men were making statues for *just one goddess*, Acts 19:25 says this was their income (“wealth”). Idolatry was a booming business and this was one of the challenges to the gospel. As the “gospel was just beginning to be proclaimed, when pagan impiety still held sway, fires burned on the altars, sacrifices and libations were being performed, and the pagans were in the majority. Imagine people who had inherited paganism from their ancestors and were descendants of pagan fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers” (The Church’s Bible, p. 139).

As time passes many issues often become less of a problem. Since the gospel was new in the first century (the time this letter was written), a lot of people had not had the chance to think through how Christians should act in an idolatrous world. Paul wanted his brethren to know that love had to prevail if some Christians had reservations about eating idol meat. Jesus was able to set aside some things to save us (Phil. 2:7), and we can forfeit certain rights (avoid certain activities) if doing so helps Christians with a weak conscience.

8:12: *And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin against Christ.*

This is a very potent passage. Twice in this verse Paul used the word “sin” (*hamartano*), and each time the verb is in the present tense. Eating idol meat (if those at the table didn’t object to it) was permissible. However, if those who approved of the idol meat caused “weak” Christians to somehow become involved with this food (especially the eating of it), there was a “sin against Christ” (see this principle expressed in Mt. 25:40, 45; Acts 9:4-5). Such an act was also “sinning against the brethren” (compare Gen. 20:9; 42:22; Ex. 32:21; 1 Sam. 2:25; Mt. 18:21).

How we treat fellow Christians (good or bad) is ultimately how we treat Jesus because Christians are members of the body (the church) and Jesus is the head of this body (Eph. 1:22-23). If a Christian sins against a fellow saint (Mt. 18:15), he also sins against Christ (1 Cor. 8:12). A Christian can sin to the point where he destroys a child of God. If and when such occurs, Jesus (Mt. 18:6-7) and Paul (1 Cor. 3:16-17) promised spiritual destruction (damnation). Many sins against brethren may not be fatal, but they can cut deeply and leave wounds that take a long time to heal. Saints may be “sinned against” by an unfair rebuke, false rumors, lies, gossip, and other actions inconsistent with agape love as well as the golden rule (Mt. 7:12). Not all sins against the Lord are sins against brethren, but all sins against brethren are sins against Jesus.

“Wounding” (*tupto*) is a present tense verb. It is also a very strong word (see how it is used in Mt. 24:49; 27:30; Lk. 22:64; Acts 21:32). Willis (p. 226) said, “By one act, a person can commit spiritual homicide and suicide!” “The present participle ‘when weak’ describes the helpless condition of the conscience which is unable to endure the blow” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 347).

8:13: *Wherefore, if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh for evermore, that I cause not my brother to stumble.*

Here is the conclusion to the subject discussed in this chapter. If strong Christians coerced weak

brethren (verse 12) to eat the idol meat, they sinned. If weak Christians allowed themselves to be pressured into eating the meat, they sinned. Instead of insisting that weak Christians eat the meat, it was best to avoid this food so weak Christians (those with a very sensitive conscience) would not “*stumble*.” *Stumble* (*skandalizo*) is a verb that occurs twice in this verse and in 13a it is in the present tense. Brown (2:708) defined this term as “to lead into sin, to give offence.” Jesus used this same word (Mt. 17:27) to say not paying a tax would cause people to “stumble” (provoke, raise dissension).

The *stumbling* (“*offending*,” KJV) in this chapter was not over minor matters (see how this term was also used by Jesus in Mt. 18:6). Here *stumbling* describes Christians who would be exposed to an activity that would so wound their conscience they would be destroyed and lose their salvation (compare verse 11 and Rom. 14:15, places where Paul spoke of Christians who “*perish*” and are “*destroyed*”). If eating food sacrificed to an idol could damage or destroy a Christian (perhaps it would lead a person back into idolatry), Paul said, “*I will eat no flesh for evermore, that I cause not my brother to stumble.*” “Protecting those in Christ takes precedence over exercising freedom” (Holman, 7:138). In this part of the verse we also see the type of relationships we should have with one another. Paul said “*my brother*.” If in our physical families we knew an act would trouble and destroy our loved ones, we would avoid it. How much more readily should we be ready to bear with those in our spiritual family! Paul said he would avoid this food “*while the world standeth*” (KJV). The ASV says “*for evermore*.” Saying “no” to something forever is a true demonstration of love and care.

Willis (p. 227) correctly noted how this verse is one of the most frequently abused passages in the New Testament. When people do not like a practice within a local congregation they often say, “This makes me stumble. This offends me and you must stop doing it.” This is not what Paul had in mind, and it is certainly not what is discussed in this chapter. There is a vast difference between practices we *do not like* and matters that make us *stumble* and *violate our conscience*. In the previous paragraphs Paul spoke of a weak Christian being “*emboldened*” (built up, verse 10). That is, a Christian who was conscientiously bothered by a practice was pressured to do something his conscience condemned. Only in a case where a person is pressured to conform to or accept a practice that violates his conscience would the principles in this chapter apply. Nothing in this chapter or anywhere else in the Scriptures obligates Christians to give in to every crank and silly objection made by members of the church (compare Gal. 2:4-5 in this regard). We should never, however, claim any right or engage in any practice that would destroy a fellow Christian.

When Christians differ on matters of judgment, the golden rule (Matt. 7:12) obligates both sides to do some “giving.” The Bible Knowledge Commentary (p. 522) rightly noted how “The ‘weak brother’ was no omnipresent phantom but an individual who was to be taught so that he too could enjoy his freedom (Gal. 5:1).” Weak Christians are not to be forced or pressured, but failing to teach them in the areas wherein they are weak results in a great disservice to them and the rest of the church. If the weak are not to be taught about matters that trouble them, why did Paul refer to them as “weak”? This single term implies that people need to be instructed to strengthen their conscience. If it is fine for Christians to remain in a *weak* state (an overly sensitive conscience on matters of judgment), why did Paul spend so much time trying to teach the truth on this and other subjects?

Ultimately this entire topic is a matter of balance. Until the end of time there will be cases where one Christian is comfortable with something and another is not. What bothers the conscience of one Christian will not pose any problem for another. What may tempt one will not tempt another. In the grand scheme of things we need to think about the effects of our choices because our decisions affect us and other Christians. Only rarely can we make judgments about matters of judgment solely on knowledge (love is also a key factor).

Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 598) said, “The strong Christian knows that he has this freedom, but he also knows that freedom involves responsibility. I have the freedom, for example, to take my car out of the garage and drive it on the highway; *but I must drive it responsibly*. I am not free to drive at any speed on my street; nor am I free to ignore the traffic signs along the way.” “We must protect the weak until they, too, become strong. Negatively, we must not offend their conscience; positively, we must bear with them and instruct them” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p. 349).

In the next chapter there are specific examples for the principles described in this chapter. Paul continues to discuss the subject of eating idol meat and appeals to his own life to illustrate the information in this chapter. On moral and doctrinal matters, we must abide by the word of God. On neutral things (matters of moral indifference and non-doctrinal items), love must be the prevailing guide.