

1 Corinthians – Lesson 10

8 Now concerning (Περί δέ) things offered to idols (ὁ εἰδωλόθυτος): We know (οἶδα) that we all have knowledge (γνῶσις). Knowledge (ὁ γνῶσις) puffs up (φυσιόω), but love (ὁ ἀγάπη) edifies (οἰκοδομέω). 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows (οἶδα) anything, he knows (γινώσκω) nothing yet as he ought to know (γινώσκω). 3 But if anyone loves (ἀγαπάω) God, this one is known (γινώσκω) by Him. 4 Therefore concerning (περί) the eating of things offered to idols (ὁ εἰδωλόθυτος), we know (οἶδα) that an idol (εἰδωλον) is nothing in the world (κόσμος), and that there is no other God (θεός) but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods (θεός), whether in heaven (οὐρανός) or on earth (γῆ) (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet (ἀλλά) for us there is one God (θεός), the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

8:1 – Just as Paul began chapter 7, he begins chapter 8 – “**Now concerning**” – Περί δέ (and as he also began 7:25). So, Paul is now turning to a third matter they raised in their letter to him: “**things offered to idols**” – ὁ εἰδωλόθυτος (*ho ay-doh-lo'-thoo-tose*). Before discussing this term, notice that Paul starts talking about knowledge (γνῶσις – *g^{uh}-no'-sis*). Paul says, “**We know** (οἶδα – *oy'-dah*) **that we all have knowlege** (γνῶσις).” Evidently this is Paul’s response to something they wrote in their letter. We sometimes reply in the same way to others: “I know that I have some gray hair!” Paul’s last use of this word “knowledge” (γνῶσις) was in his thanksgiving at the beginning of this letter in 1:5. Knowledge seemed to hold some type of sway over some of the Corinthians because Paul contrasts it with love. “**Knowledge puffs up** (φυσιόω – *foo-see-o'-o*)” and Paul had already told them he didn’t want them to be “**puffed up** (φυσιόω) **on behalf of one against the other**” (4:6). Paul uses this Greek word six of its seven times in the New Testament in this letter. Abuse of knowledge tends to do this but love – ἀγάπη (*ah-gah'-pay*) – builds up (οἰκοδομέω – *oy-ko-doh-meh'-o*) as in erecting a building. These are two statements we all understand. We’ve all known someone who is arrogant because of their educational degree. Paul is going to continue talking about knowledge in the next two verses so let’s briefly look at the term εἰδωλόθυτος – “**things offered to idols**”. It is used twice in connection with the Jerusalem decree – Acts 15:29 and 21:25. It is also used negatively in Revelation 2:14 and 20. The other five appearances of this word in the New Testament are in this letter – four in this chapter. Here in verse 1 we don’t know yet exactly what Paul is addressing – whether it is right or wrong to attend the pagan feasts or to buy meat in the marketplace which had been sacrificed to idols. The NIV includes an alternate reading in a footnote – “**We all possess knowledge**” as you say. This could indicate that Paul is addressing a slogan in their letter – as he may have done in 7:1. As for love building up (οἰκοδομέω), Paul will explain this in detail in chapter 13 – although this Greek term is not used there. However, it is very plain in 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

8:2 – This verse sounds very simple and reminds us of Paul’s statement back in 3:18 – **Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.** When we get to the point that we think we know something about something, we realize how little we really know. Perhaps we need to take this verse and the next at face value for the time being and reflect on them as we get to the issue Paul is addressing.

8:3 – We might have expected Paul to have said, “But if anyone loves God, he has real knowledge.” Instead, he says, **“If anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.”** And this is a very important distinction. A lot of people know who God is, but it is more important for God to know you. Consider *2 Timothy 2:19* – **The Lord knows those who are His.** It is possible that Paul is simply saying that earthly knowledge is meaningless in salvation. Or perhaps he is concerned with the failure of some Corinthians to love others in the congregation who do not share their “knowledge”.

8:4 – The issue raised by the Corinthians then is eating food that has been sacrificed to idols – but again we don’t know if the reference is going to the pagan feasts or buying meat in the marketplace. **“We know”** probably indicates this is something the Corinthians put in their letter and Paul is agreeing with them. It is true that an idol is nothing. The Old Testament idea of idols is expressed by terms such as emptiness and nothing. See *Jeremiah 10:11-16*. And, we also know that there is no other God but one. One of the first things a young Jewish boy learns is the *Shema*. This term derives from *Deuteronomy 6:4* – **Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!** It is recited at the morning and evening prayers. *Shema* simply means to hear or listen in Hebrew. It even appears in most English dictionaries.

8:5-6 – These two verses are one sentence in Greek and the **“for”** (γάρ) which begins verse 5 is explanatory – it expands on verse 4. Paul has just stated in verse 4 that there is only one God. In verse 5, he begins by raising the possibility of **“so-called”** gods in heaven or on earth. And then, parenthetically, Paul states there are many gods and lords. Paul is not asserting that these actually exist, but that people believe in these pagan deities. In other words, the heathen world worshiped a variety of deities – none of which were real. (The LORD proved that on Mt. Carmel – *1 Kings 18:20-39*.) Then, in verse 6, Paul draws a conclusion from the possibility he raised in verse 5. **“Yet”** (ἀλλά) or **“but”** – in contrast to the idolaters – **“for us”** (Christians) – and this is put first in this verse for emphasis – there is one God in opposition to many gods. And Paul defines God as the Father – the source and creator of all things. Again, this is in opposition to the pagan world in which each god and goddess was responsible for a particular sphere, e.g. water or fire. And we (Christians) exist for Him. Instead of there being many lords (or masters), there is only one: the Lord Jesus Christ – the agent of God’s creation (*John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-16*). And, we exist by Christ or live through Him – He is our redemption – we live in Christ as new creatures (*2 Corinthians 5:17*).

7 However (ἀλλά), there is not in everyone that knowledge (γνῶσις); for some, with consciousness (συνείδησις) of the idol (εἰδωλον), until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol (εἰδωλόθυτος); and their conscience (συνείδησις), being weak, is defiled (μολύνω). **8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.**

8:7 – Let’s look at the first part of the verse and “knowledge” before dealing with “conscience”. This chapter began with the mention of “knowledge”. The first part of this verse is literally: “But not in everyone the knowledge”. Not everyone – not every Christian – shares the same knowledge of what Paul has just stated in verses 4-6 about idols, etc. Although the word “love” is not mentioned, Paul shows in verses 7-13 that love – not knowledge – builds up as stated in verse 1. **For some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol,** When we became Christians, was it easy

to forget everything in our past? Even if you were a relatively good person, there must have been some ideas or beliefs that were incompatible with Christianity. Suppose you were superstitious. Did you stop walking under ladders after you were baptized? For the Corinthian who had been a pagan – accustomed to eating at the pagan feasts, it might be difficult for some to eat at a feast or some meat that had been sacrificed to an idol and not have a tendency to remember or consider that former idol they had worshiped. Even if you admitted that there is only one God and one Lord, there could be some wavering when you actually ate food that had been sacrificed to an idol – especially if it was the idol you had worshiped before. Apparently not all the believers in the church at Corinth had totally rejected polytheism for Christian monotheism. **And their conscience, being weak, is defiled.** Their moral consciousness is weak – when they eat idol food. In other words, though they had accepted one God intellectually, this concept had not been fully incorporated emotionally. Therefore, their relationship to Christ was being weakened – their moral consciousness was being defiled. To illustrate, I can go into a place that serves alcoholic beverages and I am not affected; however, a Christian who is an alcoholic will probably be tempted.

8:8 – Paul may be aiming this at the monotheistic believers who would offend the weak. Food, like circumcision, does not make us acceptable to God. In Christianity, God is indifferent to both. Eating or abstaining does not alter our status with God (cf. *Romans 14:17*).

9 But beware (βλέπω) lest somehow this liberty (ἐξουσία) of yours become a stumbling block (προσκομμα) to those who are weak. 10 For (γάρ) if anyone sees you who have knowledge (γνώσις) eating in an idol's temple (εἰδωλείον), will not the conscience (συνείδησις) of him who is weak be emboldened (οἰκοδομέω) to eat those things offered to idols (εἰδωλόθυτος)? 11 And because of your knowledge (γνώσις) shall the weak brother (ἀδελφός) perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin (ἁμαρτάνω) against the brethren (ἀδελφός), and wound their weak conscience (συνείδησις), you sin (ἁμαρτάνω) against Christ. 13 Therefore (διόπερ), if food makes my brother (ἀδελφός) stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble (σκανδαλίζω).

8:9 – Now Paul gives the warning about knowledge as opposed to love. Intellectually, an idol is nothing and you are free to eat food which is sacrificed to these idols of nothingness but...even though what you eat or do not eat does not commend you to God or make you acceptable to God...if you insist on exercising your freedom or authority (**ἐξουσία** – ex-oo-see ´ah), you have to be sure this is not a cause for stumbling to the weak – to the one who would eat idol food and revert to their pagan beliefs.

8:10 – This verse now unlocks the meaning of the entire passage. We can see that people are actually going to the temples and eating food sacrificed to idols. These are those who have knowledge (**γνώσις**). But the person who does not share the same level of knowledge – whose conscience is weak – will see you exercising your right and be emboldened or encouraged (**οἰκοδομέω** – same Greek word translated “edifies” in verse 1) to do the same. Instead of love building up, knowledge is building up for destruction. The person who is weak would imitate their actions – go to the pagan temple and eat idol food and think of it in terms of his past idolatry – and perhaps return to paganism. You have then become a stumbling block to the weak. And the next verse gives the result.

8:11 – By exercising your rights, the weak brother loses his soul – he is destroyed. This is the brother in Christ for whom Christ died on the cross. The weak brother perishes. (See *Romans 14:15*.) This doesn't mean you hurt his feelings which is how some people have taken this. Just because you don't think preachers should wear red suits doesn't mean I shouldn't wear one. It might hurt your feelings and I should be sensitive to those feelings – but I'm not destroying you.

8:12 – This verse explains verse 11 – it is a sin to wound your brother's weak conscience. Wound means to beat or strike – you are responsible for his injuries. But your sin is not just against that brother – it is a sin against Christ!

8:13 – **Therefore** (διόπερ – *dee-oh'-pehr* – used only here, 10:14, and 14:13 in the New Testament) indicates that Paul is bringing his argument to a conclusion. In this and the previous two verses, brothers are mentioned four times. This means they are very important. Notice how Paul switches to the first person “I” and then generalizes. He doesn't say he wouldn't eat idol food or go to the pagan temples if food caused his brother to stumble. He says he would become a vegetarian! Satisfying ourselves and exercising our freedom are not important matters – the good of the brotherhood comes first for Paul. The Greek word for “**makes stumble**” (σκανδαλίζω – *skahn-dah-leed'-zo* – from which we get “scandal”) is synonymous with the word for “**stumbling block**” in verse 9. The noun of this verb – σκάνδαλον – *skahn'-dah-lone* – was also translated “**stumbling block**” in 1:23. This entire issue becomes clearer in the next two chapters. But, in this verse, Paul changes to the first person as a transition to his argument in the next chapter. See *Romans 14* for a similar argument regarding food and drink.