1 Corinthians 8:7-13

Things sacrificed to Idols & the weaker brother 2

7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

# Eternal Context and Its Impact on Liberty

Worship: expression of reverence and adoration to a deity. In the English it is a compound word for the idea of worth-ship.

Idolatry : worship of a thing as a god instead of worshiping the God of the Bible. Rooted in a worldview that is against the scripture. Fleshly thinking is not the same as idolatry, but may overlap.

Conscience: A personal conviction about rightness and wrongness of one’s own behavior, and possibly of others behavior.

Paul emphasizes the ‘as if’ nature of the so-called sacrifice. If a believer does not understand their position in Christ then they will be unable to fully put weight in their liberty to consume the meat as it was sacrificed to nothing and holds no spiritual value in any pagan ceremony. The sacrifice was not to worship the God of the Bible, but it was also not actually worshiping the non-existent idol.

*What is a weak conscience?*

Paul continues on to say that despite the lack of a real idol with real deity and despite the sacrifice counting for nothing the believer’s conscience *is* defiled or contaminated. Because this is a personal, conscientious objection their sense of fellowship with God is inhibited. This is conditional, it is non-theological, and it should not be seen as a doctrinal absolute. So we look at what makes a weak conscience.

Our conscience is directed by the Spirit when we abide and He often works in tandem with what we’ve grown to understand from the scriptures about clearly stated doctrinal truth. Weakness may come from a lack of abiding, deception and errant theology [which would impact understanding], a lack of understanding, addictions, culture, or bad reasoning and correlation.

Paul refers to flesh sacrificed in this passage but any number of modern equivalents will do:

* Alcohol consumption
* Yoga as exercises
* Clothing choices
* Hair styles
* Tattoos and piercings
* Smoking
* Movies, TV shows, Music and entertainment
* Political affiliation
* Career aspirations or paths

As a believer if I look to the scriptures for guidance I find that any number of things might be permissible [1 Corinthians 6:12], but my own conscience may not bear it. I may be weak in areas that no other member of the body is aware of (yet), but the weakness is something the Lord knows about.

# Food Will Not Commend Us to God

*What commends the believer to God?*

Faith! The believer’s own merit does not draw us close to God, but the work of Christ on the cross. Our belief bears the fruit of salvation – the actions that come after that are a fruit of His work (Galatians 5:22-23) and they don’t commend us to God, they reflect our relationship with Him. So eating food – or abstaining - will not save us, nor will it make us more sanctified.

## An Example From Music

At Holly Hills we have yet to have very much percussion as part of the worship service because for some folks this would be a stumbling block. What’s interesting to observe of those who visit is that some of them leave the church – sometimes as the music starts - for the other side of the very same stumbling block, only it’s because we have an organ. The organ or percussion are not anything but instruments or tools in the hands of believers who can be abiding or not – the instruments are neutral, but the hearts and minds of the saints may be attached to cultural expectations that cause stumbling.

# But Take Care!

Liberty should not lead to causing stumbling inside of the body. This leads to several needs within the body: we need to know one another and have intimate fellowship within the body that leads us to understand what is hampering others and weaknesses they may have. This will lead us to deeper intimacy because the areas that are or were stumbling blocks are not being put in our paths. We can be praying for one another. Modeling liberty, but doing so respectfully and with humility [Romans 12:1-3].

Human judgment of behaviors is not always impartial. We do things sometimes with ignorance or carnality where the discernment and discrimination of God is perfect. God judges the heart and mankind often judges the actions of others.

## The Difference Between Grace, Liberty and License

Often the words grace and liberty are thrown around interchangeably as well as the terms liberty and license. These are not synonyms and it’s valuable to understand them in a biblical context.

Grace is the unmerited, unlimited, blessing of God due to the totally adequate work of Christ on the cross. It motivates us as a response and is not merely a covering for sin.

Liberty is the optional, conscientious ability for the believer to engage in certain activities both personally and publicly because we are not under the Law.

License is the permission to do things and often comes paired with the encouragement to do them without deference to one another.

The reason why these three terms need to be differentiated biblically is that we need to make sure that we don’t engage one another with legalism *or* selfishness. We operate in the realm of grace, we live with liberty, we love by living without license.

# If Someone Sees You

Paul then moves onto this idea that we might be seen somewhere that we have liberty to be and in being seen others stumble. Paul’s example of meet being offered to idols goes to the extreme exaggeration of dining at the temple of the idol.

Worship and Prayer in had the following liturgy:

* Greet the god in as many of his or her names as you can--especially those relevant for the task.
* Remind the god of all of the things that you've done for them
* Request the favor of the god in a way relevant to what you're after
* Worship and thank the god.
* Offer a sacrifice when the favor has been granted

So if you were seen in the temple you would find yourself eating the meat that had been offered up to the pagan deity for something that you should have thanked the Father for. The number of offenses or correlated (but not proven) activities might be many – and the weaker brother might find you guilty by association.

# He Who is Weak is Ruined

In New Testament times those who were not able to walk in liberty due to weakness might either revert to paganism or walk away for lack of understanding. Neither of these was a desirable outcome. Paul’s concern is that liberty not be flaunted as license and the weak not be harmed in any way. Deference was key to exercising the liberties afforded to the sanctified believer.

# Sinning Against the Brethren; Sinning Against Christ

In walking in liberty (something that is not sinful) you have caused your brother to stumble, which is sinful (if it was done willfully with knowledge). Paul is not likely talking about a situation where liberties were taken and a brother was accidentally offended, but instead a behavior that is known to irritate, because of the liberty, is done with belligerence or antagonism. Since the attitude is hard and the one hurt is a brother in Christ the sin is against Christ.

*When we sin against Christ is our salvation impacted?*

Given that salvation is secure the impact here is inside of and outside of the body. Given that we’re to look to one another with care and concern, esteeming others more highly than ourselves, this outcome is not healthy for the body. Furthermore, given that our testimony with the world can be impacted by harm inflicted inside the church, we need to have concern for the outcome of our offense to the weak.

# No Sacrificed Meat Until the World Ends

Paul is emphatic about how our response to causing stumbling should be: as long as the earth stands. We find within the body that Paul is eager to seek compassion and love as the reflection of who we are in Christ within the body. There is no room for selfishness and acts of the flesh. The Greek sentence underneath where most modern translations say, “again,” says, “I would not likely eat sacrificed flesh again into the age.” The idea here is that until Jesus comes we don’t cause each other to stumble. The point here is not vegetarianism because the topic here is sacrificed flesh and not just meat. Paul has the liberty, but love trumps the possible outcome of stumbling.

# Conclusion

For our own personal edification we need to consider our own liberties and weaknesses with great care and reflect upon our heavenly position and its impact on our lives. We are not called to openly sin, but we should not walk in fear of offense and give up our liberty. We are to abide, love, and manifest the life of Christ within and without the body.

Mapping Romans 12 and the beginning of 13 as a sort of model we can see the following observations:

And we should be reminded, no matter our weakness, that nothing can separate us from the Love of God:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38-39