

I CORINTHIANS 8

MAN'S QUESTIONS, GOD'S ANSWERS

STUDENT GUIDE

DAILY BIBLE READING

DAY 1	I CORINTHIANS 8: 1-4
DAY 2	I CORINTHIANS 8: 5-8
DAY 3	I CORINTHIANS 8: 9-13
DAY 4	I CORINTHIANS 8: 1-13
DAY 5	I CORINTHIANS 8: 1-13
DAY 6	I CORINTHIANS 8: 1-13
DAY 7	I CORINTHIANS 8: 1-13

Paul had received a letter from his friends in Corinth (7:1). 1 Corinthians constituted an answer to their letter. The Corinthians dealt with many problems, problems that threatened their very existence as a church. And, as we will learn today, the Christians in Corinth even had questions concerning questionable behavior! In other words, they were struggling with issues the Bible clearly condemned (5:1ff), as well as with issues not directly addressed in Scripture. What the Word condemns, we have no right to debate. But how do we handle issues not forthright in Scripture? No single issue is more relevant for the church of Jesus Christ today.

OUTLINE

- 1. The Intellectual Principle (vv.1-4)** - At first glance, there seems to be no connection with us. We do not have a problem with offering meat to idols, as did they. True. Nevertheless, the occasion we have here opens the door for Paul to deal with an issue vital to every one of us. Namely, if there is no clear cut commandment in the Bible touching upon a certain matter, how do we determine if it is right or wrong? Believers possess no privilege of debating whether or not to allow a moral injunction plainly spelled out in the Bible. Paul is concerned with issues where no apparent verses exist which apply to the situation at hand. Paul actually addresses this dilemma in his answer to Corinth. And, it is his answer that gives modern believers confidence that God does not leave His people in the dark concerning His will!

The first principle Paul reveals is the *intellectual* principle. Paul affirms, "we all have knowledge." As we unpack Paul's understanding of "knowledge," we can view it from two different angles:

A.) *Content of Knowledge (vv. 1,4)* — Certain truths were revealed to the Corinthians. At this point we must remember that the only sure source of knowing the will of God is the Word of God. It is not that the Holy Spirit does not work in the hearts of believers, guiding and affirming God's direction for the believer's life. Rather it is the simple, indisputable fact that the Holy Spirit primarily employs the Scripture as He guides the people of God. *If we do not know the Word of God, it is doubtful we will ever discover the will of God for our lives.*

B.) *Control of Knowledge* — Paul says that if a person thinks something is known, he or she probably is overestimating his or her abilities. Humility should characterize every child of God who desires to know the will of God.

On the other hand, while knowledge possesses a tendency to bloat our egos, love's contribution is edification. We simply cannot solve all questionable issues on knowledge alone. According to Scripture, love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). Love looks to protect others while knowledge focuses in on itself.

Question: Do you think the church tends to assume people outside the church should behave "more Christianly"? Why or why not? What can we do to make sure knowledge does not make us appear self-righteous?

2. The Spiritual Principle (vv. 5-8) — When we come to spirituality, there were two kinds of Christians at Corinth - strong and weak. As we look at the spiritual principle, there are two considerations we must examine.

A.) *Spiritual Reality (vv. 5-6)* — Understand: Paul was not denying other "gods" existed. In fact, he plainly says, "there be many gods." But he does not mean more than one true and living God exists. The "many gods" are imaginary gods. They have no significance in heaven or earth. The reality of the matter is this: only one true and living God exists and He has fully revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 6)

B.) *Spiritual Maturity (vv. 7-8)* — Food in and of itself cannot make one a saint or a sinner. Food does not determine our relationship with God. However, every Christian may not know this reality. In fact, some of the weaker brothers still had reservations in their consciences pertaining to eating sacrificed meat. Perhaps it was because he or she recalled the idolatry associated with the meat before conversion to Christ. Consequently, to him or her, coming to Christ meant a clean break with the old forms of worship. The last thing Paul would have is for the Corinthians to be accomplices in assisting weak Christians to take up their old ways. Love demands, however, that if an act is unsafe for another brother, we must assist him in his journey to an undefiled conscience. Hence, we cannot plead our "freedom in Christ" to make us exempt from the restricted behavior. To do so is selfish and voids love for one another. Our responsibility is to edify the body of Christ.

Question: Since love seeks to edify one another, does that mean believers must consider how their actions will affect other people? Explain. If we are to govern our actions by what others think, what if what others think is not supported by God's Word? How do we strike a balance?

3. The Social Principle (vv. 9-13) — There is simply no way around this reality: *others are watching how the believer behaves*. Indeed there may be a multitude of things I can do in my private life that will not adversely affect my own walk with God. In that sense, I am perfectly free to do the act, bearing no guilt whatsoever in doing it *per se*. Paul's point is, while it may be true your actions will have no negative impact on your life or walk with God, many of the free acts we may do could significantly impact others in a negative way.

Wrap Up: *Paul gave three principles which, when heeded, will guide Christians through virtually any behavior they may consider questionable. We must never forget the intellectual principle, always keep in mind the pursuit of humility. Love edifies but knowledge alone may do more harm than good. This is a spiritual principle we have no option to ignore. Mature believers have an assigned responsibility to watch and care for weak believers. No person is an island. We are social beings. The church is the body of Christ; therefore, we have the social principle to guide us along the way.*