

# Discovering God's Wisdom

## STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

### Lesson 9 1 Corinthians 8

#### *Searching the Scriptures for hidden treasure*

*"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162*

When you read this chapter you will think it is about meat offered to idols—which it is! It is also about Christian liberty and, in fact, the subject of liberty will continue through chapter 10. However, there is an even more important theme that runs through this chapter, and that is the theme of love. We might entitle this chapter, *Liberty Sifted through Love*.

#### **First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-3**

We don't know the exact question Paul was asked, but it seems obvious that they wanted an absolute word on the issue of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. We can tell from Paul's response that the *strong* Corinthian Christians assumed that their knowledge of God and their understanding of the fact that idols were really nothing gave them the freedom to eat this meat, whether sold at the marketplace or in the actual temple. Paul deals first with the question of their *knowledge*, laying the foundation for his answer to their actual question. It is possible that Paul repeats their own words, as they were written to him, when he says, "*we know that we all have knowledge.*"

1. Even though they "*all have knowledge,*" in a word, what does Paul see as the priority?
  - a. According to Paul, what does *knowledge* do?
  - b. What do you think this means?
  
2. According to Paul, what does *love* do?
  - a. Using your dictionary, define the word *edify*.

In the Greek, the word for love is *oikodomeo* and means to be a house-builder, construct, confirm, build, edify, embolden.

- b. With these definitions in mind, can you say that you are *loving* anyone in the way Paul speaks of here in chapter 8? Who would you like to begin loving in this way? How can you begin to apply this idea of love *edifying* this very week in your own home? Remember, love is a *house-builder*!

3. That Paul begins with this statement (verse 1) tells us something about these *strong* Corinthian Christians. What does it tell us?
  - a. To succinctly state what Paul is communicating to them in verse 1 about *knowledge* and *love*, fill in the following statement: *To \_\_\_\_\_ is better than to\_\_\_\_\_.*

Although Paul will soon give them his thoughts on whether or not it is proper for Christians to eat meat sacrificed to idols, first he wants them to understand that *love* rules. They may *know* that idols are nothing (verse 4), but love for others overrules what knowledge may permit: love does not serve knowledge, knowledge serves love.

Because we see in verse 1 that Paul makes a contrast between knowledge and love with love coming in as superior, we must look at verse 2 in that same light. The Amplified Bible translates it this way:

*“If anyone imagines that he has come to know and understand much [of divine things, without love], he does not yet perceive and recognize and understand as strongly and clearly, nor has he become as intimately acquainted with anything as he ought or as is necessary.”*

- b. What is Paul trying to say in this verse?

### *Making It Personal...*

4. In verse 3 Paul makes the statement that the one who loves God is known by Him. Consider which is more significant, that you know God, or that He knows you.
  - a. Look at what the Apostle John calls himself in John 13:23. Have you ever thought of yourself in those terms—as the disciple whom Jesus loves? What difference might it make in your relationship to Jesus if you saw yourself from that point of view?

Listen to what J.I. Packer says on this subject: *“What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—the fact that **He knows me**. I am graven on the palms of His hands; I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because He first knew me and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend...”* Selah!!!

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today’s passage in a couple of sentences.

### *Pearl of Great Price*

**“...Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”** Galatians 5:13 This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

**Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 8:4-6**

1. What stand did the Jerusalem Council take on meat sacrificed to idols? Acts 15:28-29
  - a. What was Paul's previous word to the Corinthians concerning associating with idolaters? 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

It would seem from these verses that the answer to the question, "*Can a Christian eat meat sacrificed to idols?*" was *No!* But we remember again that this was an occasional letter, written to this specific church in this specific Greek area and culture. Paul would stand behind the decision of the Jerusalem Council in general. Obviously, they were not to associate with Christians who actually worshipped idols, but the culture of these Corinthians made it nearly impossible not to come into contact with idolatry, both at the temple, which was the common dining hall for the festivities of life, or at the market place, where the remaining meat was sent and sold. Because of the Corinthian's unusual circumstances, Paul uses wisdom and truth as the basis for his answer to their question. In verse 4, Paul brings us back to his original topic with verses 4-6 giving the theological reason for the Corinthian's freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Let's look at his basic theology here:

2. What 2 things did they collectively *know*, according to verse 4?
  - a. Deuteronomy 6:4 gives the mantra of the Jews concerning their one God. What is it?
  - b. What is an idol? (You may use your dictionary for help.)
  - c. Because someone says that a piece of wood or stone is a *god*, does that make it one? How do we know an idol is *nothing* (verse 4 gives the best answer for this question!)?

Paul makes the concession that there were other so-called *gods* (with a little *g*)—mythological deities and lords worshipped by the cults, and even emperors of that time who were beginning to consider themselves divine and demand worship. But, although the world had gods of their own, there was only one true God—the one who had the ability to save the Corinthians from eternal death and hell.

3. In verse 6, Paul describes the one God the Corinthians had come to believe in.
  - What does he say about *God the Father*?
  - What he say about *the Lord Jesus Christ*?

- a. Paul is using this description of God to help the Corinthians make the contrast between the *real God* they have come to believe in and the *idols* worshipped in Corinth by non-believers. From the content of today's passage (verses 4-6) what is the difference?

### *Making It Personal...*

4. As you consider the question that Paul is attempting to answer here, what are your personal thoughts? If there is only one *real God* and idols are really *nothing*, in your own mind, was it all right for the Corinthians to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols?

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Isaiah 44:9-20 gives God's description of idols. Read the following verses and answer the questions:

verses 14-17—*What is an idol?*

verses 18-19—*Describe an idol worshipper.*

verse 20—*What is the fruit of idol worship?*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

### **Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 8:7-13**

Even though the question of the hour was whether it was all right for the Christian Corinthians to eat meat sacrificed to idols, we will see today that Paul made it about something else altogether. To Paul the question was more about *loving the brethren* than what a believer may or may not eat.

1. Look at these verses and fill in the blanks:

verse 1—*We know* \_\_\_\_\_.

verse 4—*We know* \_\_\_\_\_.

verse 7—*However* \_\_\_\_\_.

The NIV translates verse 7 simply, "*But not everyone knows this,*" and that is the key. While Paul knew this, and while many of the *stronger* Corinthians knew this, everyone did not know that idols were nothing.

- a. How does Paul describe the one who *does not know this*, in verse 7?

We must remember the situation of the Corinthians at this time. They had only recently come out of a lifestyle of idol worship. Although some of these new Christians were able to recognize the truth of the matter, many still associated the meat with the sacrifice and were unable to separate the two. The NASB says it this way, “*but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol...*” They were accustomed to the fact that meat was offered to idols, and felt that they were defiled if they touched that meat.

2. According to Paul, it doesn’t really matter whether you eat or you don’t eat, because food does not commend us to God. From verses 9-12, explain what does matter to Paul.
  - a. What did Jesus say about stumbling blocks? Matthew 18:7
3. Although Paul had a *strong* conscience, and had a clear understanding of the truth of the matter, to what conclusion did he come? v. 13

### *Making It Personal...*

There are many gray areas in life, things that are not specifically addressed in Scripture, like drinking alcohol, playing cards, watching adult movies, and you can probably think of more...

4. What are some things that you know you cannot touch without being personally defiled? What does Romans 14:23 say about this?
  - a. Is there anything others deem wrong, but you feel you can do without sinning? Do you flaunt your liberty? What have you learned in this chapter about stumbling others?
  - b. How does *holiness* fit into this subject for you?

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Tie this week’s memory verse (Galatians 5:13) with the heart of what Paul is saying in this chapter.

**Fourth Day:**

**Deeper Discoveries**

*This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)*

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

**Liberty** (8:9) *"But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak."*

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? 1 Corinthians 7:37; Galatians 5:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:9  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Conscience** (8:12) *"...When you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ..."*

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? Romans 2:15; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Corinthians 10:29-33; 2 Corinthians 1:12  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***Fifth Day:***

***Heartsearch***

*Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.*

**Lending a Hand in Love**

Paul has just told the Corinthians that “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (or, in other words, *builds up*). Paul’s concern is that the weaker Christians would grow out of their weak state and that the stronger Christians would help them to grow. It is a common misconception that the strongest believers live by a strict personal code of behavioral rules and regulations and that they get offended when others exercise their freedom in Christ. The truth is it is the weaker Christians who seek the security of “rules” and who are fearful of using their Christian freedom. It is the weak believers who are more apt to become critical of another brother or sister in the Lord, often judging them, and then stumbling over what they do. This makes it difficult for the strong Christian to reach out in an effort to help the weaker one. It is also where every Christian must strive to find the balance between exercising one’s own liberty, while at the same time not stumbling someone else. The *conscience* plays an important role in helping the believer to achieve this balance.

Conscience is the internal human faculty which distinguishes between right and wrong. It is the self-awareness of one’s own conduct, and the important thing to know is that it depends on knowledge. The more knowledgeable we become spiritually, the stronger the conscience will become. The warning here is that we have to be careful not to become “puffed up” by what we know. Love and knowledge must go together, hand in hand.

1. Can you think of a time when you were aware of someone exhibiting knowledge *without* love? How were you able to relate to that individual?
2. Do you remember a time when a mature Christian used both *love* and *knowledge* to help you in a difficult situation? Briefly relate what happened and how it served to make you a stronger Christian.
3. According to Ephesians 4:15, what happens when knowledge (truth) and love are working together?

Some Christians have weak consciences because they are new in the faith; others because they refuse to grow towards maturity. To them God’s Word and the worship service are not given a high enough priority, thus keeping them in a state of infancy. Remember Paul’s words in chapter one: “*I could not speak to you as to spiritual people...but as to babes in Christ.*”





*Sixth Day:*

## ***Laying Up Treasure***

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.  
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

*I praise God for* (an aspect of His marvelous character) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I confess to God that I* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I thank God for* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I am asking God* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Praise for answered prayer:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*People/things I want to pray for this coming week:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Pearl of Great Price:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Notes*