

# **1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

## *How to Sort Through Love & Knowledge*

**8:1 Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. 2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.**

### **1. Love Exceeds Your Biblical Knowledge**

In the Church at Corinth, there were some very knowledgeable people when it came to God. They figured they could eat food sacrificed to idols because they didn't believe in them. So they would go to the temples with family members and eat the meat without a guilty conscience. Meat was a rare delicacy in the Mediterranean world—so these festivals offered a nice menu change. One of the commentators said that eating sacrificed food at the temple was like going to the “restaurant of antiquity.” So when you wanted to go to a barbecue; the temple sacrifices were the place to be.

I was trying to think of a modern day comparison. In Islam there is a festival called *Eid al-Adha* where Muslims sacrifice a goat to commemorate Abraham. In Islam they believe Abraham sacrificed Ishmael—not Isaac. Now, imagine a Christian brother feeling free to attend this festival because they do not believe the Muslim version of Abraham sacrifice. They reason, “I can participate because I have true knowledge. I know the truth! I know what the Scriptures teach about Abraham.”

But here's the issue. Although one may have knowledge about this biblical event—are they respecting God and loving the people by going to this festival? Paul says in this text—all of us possess knowledge. But knowledge puffs us up. In reality, the people that attend this festival take it very seriously. They will think you do as well. Consequently, you may not know the truth but you are not showing it. You are not loving! Verse 3 states, anyone that loves God is known by Him.

When it comes to God—love not knowledge—is the MVP of virtue.

People tend to think they are more spiritual if they know more about God than the next Christian. Not true. Spirituality is manifested by loving God and others.

I'm not saying that knowledge is a bad thing. When we read our Bibles and try to understand how we can know Him better—those are good things. We need to know about God so that we can know what acceptable behavior is and what it is not. But if our mission is to place knowledge over loving God we have missed the mark big time. The very nature of God is to love. If we love God we will be closer to Him than if we just know a bunch of facts.

**4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. 7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.**

### *2. Having Knowledge does not give You License to ignore Someone's Conscience*

Okay, so here's what's going on. Theologically, the knowledgeable people were very monotheistic. They knew there was only one God. They did not believe in the “so called gods.” For them there was only one God and one Lord—period! But there were others who were not so convinced. They came from an idol sacrificing background. They did not like the feelings they experienced being present in the temple. They just did not want to go. In retrospect, a modern conversation would go something like this: “Hey dude, chill out! There is only one God. Those guys are sacrificing to false gods and idols.” The other person would respond: “That may be true but I still don't feel comfortable eating meat that is sacrificed to idols. But dude, “That is pure 100 percent beef. I haven't had a good barbecued steak in a long time. It is okay if we eat the meat. I tell you what, “I'll eat yours for you!

I don't know, I still don't think it's right. Listen man, "I have spent these past three years learning about God. I know God. To him, meat is meat. He knows in my heart that He is the one true God." Again, the other guy responds, "I just don't feel comfortable."

Do you see what's going on here? One guy who is knowledgeable is trying to convince the other guy to eat the meat sacrificed to idols. But in doing so—he makes the other person feel guilty and defiled because he is not at the point where this won't bother his conscience. The whole temple atmosphere reminds him of his pagan past. The Bible makes a distinction between a person with a strong and weak conscience. We tend to think that someone with a weak conscience is a weak Christian—but this is not necessarily true. Most of us have areas where our conscience does not want us to be involved with something, even if the Bible does not state it is a sin. In time, this could change.

One of my weak areas used to involve dancing. I spent seven years going to all the night clubs in the Tacoma, Seattle area. I loved that atmosphere. The different trendy nightclubs, the loud bumping music, hanging out with my buddies, and of course, the pretty girls. I loved the challenge of trying to hook up with a pretty girl. But when I became a Christian, I did not want to go to any more night clubs.

When Machele and I were dating, I went to one of her roommates' wedding. After the ceremony they had a loud sounding sound system, with hip music, and of course dancing. It did not take long for those feelings to come back about the night clubs. Machele's mission was to get me to dance. She finally succeeded in a slow dance. Let me tell you I struggled. It was hard for me to convince myself it was alright.

I was interested in Machele. She was pretty. She was a Christian. But I felt guilty because dancing for me brought back memories of my days in the night club scene. Contrary to what some Christians would say, it is not a sin to dance. But for some people, this brings back memories that were anything but Christian. Dancing for me was a sensual experience. I think I am getting better now—but you have to remember for that one dance at a wedding doesn't erase seven years of dancing with women I wanted to hit on at dance clubs. Machele might think it is okay to dance—but it was not okay for me to dance because I was struggling with my weak conscience.

For some of you the issue might not be dancing—but it could be alcohol. It could be eating meat. It could be something as odd as dating someone with a tattoo. It could be going to movies. It could be listening to a certain type of music. It could even be political. I had a friend that eventually became a Christian, who told me he believed in God and was ready to accept Jesus but he did not want to be a Republican; his conscience prevented him. The Bible does not say you have to be a Republican to be a Christian. The reality is that there are gray areas in the Bible. Issues the Bible does not call a sin. In these matters, you have to rely on what your conscience says.

The sad thing that tends to happen in churches is that often the people who make the rules are those with weak consciences. Then they impose them on everyone else. The Bible does not need my help to tell you what you can or cannot do unless it is clearly defined as sin like murder, abusing children, fornicating, homosexual relationships, adultery, lying, stealing, and coveting. But when it comes to matters of conscience, God allows for you to decide by yourself. The strong Christian has no right to impose his "knowledge" on those with a weak conscience. The weak have no right to impose their matters of conscience on others if they are not clearly defined as sin in the Bible.

This brings me to my last point, it involves loving.

**8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.**

**10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. 12 Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.**

### *3. Ultimately, Love Manifested in Sacrifice must Prevail*

Paul says a couple things here that bring this issue full circle. In the end, it is not knowledge that keeps one from sinning—instead it is a lack of love. If you encourage someone to sin against their conscience, you aren't loving them; you are wounding them. You are making them feel bad about themselves and their relationship with God. Paul goes so far as to say you are sinning against Christ. He says, don't eat the meat. In other words, in love, sacrifice.

When my wife and I were married; we had a disagreement when it came to movies. We had different definitions of what we considered appropriate. In my sinful self-righteous way—I would argue with her. “I don’t see any problem with this—this does not cause me to sin. In a nutshell, my arguments revolved around what I thought. They revolved around what I considered to be superior insight. Let me tell you something it took me a long time to learn. My arguments never once strengthened our relationship—they actually made it worse. I had to learn that winning an argument was not the main objective here; the big thing was to love my wife. That meant to quit whining and to avoid purchasing questionable movies or watch questionable television programs, including some commercials.

The worse thing you can do is to try to impose your conscience on somebody else, including your spouse. It doesn’t matter who has the stronger or weaker conscience. Imposing your convictions; trying to get other people to change their mind does not make the relationship stronger. Leave change to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes He leads people to change their convictions; sometimes He doesn’t. You just don’t want to be responsible for making someone sin against their conscience. Loving someone often means sacrificing something, even if you are convinced by way of knowledge that it is okay.

## The Three Checks of Decision Making

- ✓ As you wrestle with what is right and wrong; there are three areas that must be covered. First, what does the Bible say about the issue. If the Bible calls it sin—that is the end of the inquiry. At Northside, we take the Bible literally when it comes to sin. We believe sin is sin in all times and all circumstances. Our culture does not redefine God’s definition of sin.
- ✓ The second level is conscience. If the Bible does not call it a sin specifically—then God gives us a conscience to make a decision. Some people think alcohol is a sin. It might be a sin for you but it is not a sin for everyone. The sin for everyone revolves around drunkenness. So if you like alcohol, and this does not wreck your conscience, and you drink in moderation, its okay to have a Corona or a glass of wine. If you want to be a vegetarian and boycott Wendy’s, and your conscience is okay with it—then be a vegetarian. Just don’t impose your convictions on me, especially if you run into me and I am eating a sour dough Jack from Jack in the box. I love those things! Just thinking about vegetarians makes me hungry.

Being a vegetarian is not a sin. Dancing is not a sin. It should be if you don’t have any rhythm and you’re dancing in public; but it is not unfortunately. If you want to get a tattoo or piercing, and you don’t have a bad conscience, it is not a sin. Just make sure you do it when you’re sober. I had a co-worker in Seattle get a tattoo of Satan involved in an X-rated scene with a woman. He regretted it as soon as he became sober, so did his wife. That kind of tattoo was against his conscience. But he drank too much liquid courage to remember at the time. If you are a Democrat and don’t feel guilty that is fine. Just make sure you don’t support things that are clearly defined as sin in the Bible.

- ✓ The last level is revolves around someone who has a weaker conscience. So the first level is what the Bible says. The second level is what does my conscience say? The third level is how my actions will affect my brother or sister in Christ who has a weaker conscience. So kids, if you try to use the argument with your parent that the pastor said it is okay to get a tattoo; remember they might not think it is. You have to submit on two levels. You have to obey your parents. That means if they tell you the answer is no; the answer is no. Don’t push the issue; otherwise they might give you a brush and say. “Clean the toilet.” The second level of course is conscience. If your parents are convinced in their mind that a tattoo or piercing is a sin then you have to be respectful and submit to your parents. Save your tattoo until you leave the home, if you still want it by then.

If your Vegan friend asks you to have dinner with them; don’t put on your leather coat and order steak and shrimp. Instead be sensitive about how the feel about animal rights. Sacrifice a meal. It is better to sacrifice a meal than it is to disrespect something another person feels strongly about. So, order some tofu with lots of ketchup. If you’re with someone who doesn’t like R-rated don’t movies—don’t go to one or get one. Stick to the P.G. stuff or sacrifice an evening with Mickey. In this church I will not impose my matters of conscience on you unless it is spelled out in the Bible. I want you to come to your own convictions. In the end, just because you know something is not a sin does not mean you should do it. It does not mean it is beneficial. Love has to be your guiding standard because it is superior to knowledge. Amen.