

# *Iglesia de Carne*

## Studies in First Corinthians

### Text

First Corinthians 8:1-13

### Topic

Believers who continued to attend meals in the pagan temples were encouraging others to join them, thereby becoming stumbling-blocks

### Title

***“Don’t Stumble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord”***

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File this under the category, “Who knew?”

When I was in sales, I would frequently take clients, or prospective clients, out to lunch. It was a fun perk, and to make the most of it, I tried lots of different restaurants.

There was this place in San Bernardino on Highland Avenue, near Del Rosa. I can’t remember the name, but it served Middle Eastern food. I arranged to meet with the two managing partners of a real estate office whose title insurance business I was after.

Things were going great. Menu looked good. Our waitress took our order in a prompt manner. Our conversation was good.

Then **it** happened.

Some rather loud cultural music began to play, and out came our waitress... But in a change of clothes. She was dressed, if you can call it that, full-on *I Dream of Jeannie*. She went from table-to-table **belly dancing**. She lingered at our table for what seemed an eternity.

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It was before *Yelp!* How was I to know I'd be having lunch plus dancing?

If they had *Yelp!* in the first century, and if you used it to find restaurants in Corinth, you'd see that most of them were on the site of one of the twenty-six or so pagan temples. If you were in the mood for seafood, the Temple of Poseidon was always running a special. Temples to Apollos, Dionysus, Pan, and Aphrodite were all popular dining spots. One source I consulted indicated there would be several restaurants in each temple - sort of like a food court.

The believers in Corinth had frequented these establishments all of their lives. It's where you went on date night. Or for any celebration, really. They continued to eat out at the various temple restaurants after they got saved.

At these temples, the meals were sacrificed to idols before they were served. In a previous letter to them that is lost to us, the apostle Paul had either strongly exhorted them or had forbid them from dining at the various temples, on account of the idol worship that was involved. The Corinthians refused to obey Paul, arguing that "an idol was nothing," and that "there is no other God but one" (v4).

Paul told them why they were wrong. Their arguments were not taking into account the potential for stumbling other believers (v9). One commentator put it like this: "Personal behavior is dictated not by knowledge, freedom, or law, but by love for those within the community of faith. Everything one does that affects relationships within the body of Christ should have care for brothers and sisters as its primary motivation."

Love triumphs over liberty. As we work through the verses, we will try to bring them forward to see how they apply to us. I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Have The Opportunity To Be A Building-Block**, and **#2 You Have The Obligation To Not Be A Stumbling-Block**.

### **#1 - You Have The Opportunity To Be A Building Block (v1-8)**

Just when you think this has no application, you're watching season fifteen of *Survivor*. They're in China. At the beginning of the game, the contestants went

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to a Buddhist welcoming ceremony. I remember thinking it was weird. Even though they told the contestants it was merely cultural, it was clearly a worship service. One contestant - Leslie Nease - refused to participate. She said it conflicted with her being a Christian.

How about a Hawaiian luau? It's history is that of sacrificing food to various island gods.

For that matter, how about the Enchanted Tiki Room at Disneyland? Among the gods there are Maui, Rongo, Tangaroa, and Wannahockaloogie.

Before we get too far ahead of ourselves...

1Co 8:1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

There were three parts to these meals: the preparation, the sacrifice, and the feast. The meat of the sacrifices apparently was divided into three portions: that burned before the god, that apportioned to the worshipers, and that placed on the "table of the god," which was tended by priests and priestesses but also eaten by the worshipers. The gods were thought to be present since the meals were held in their honor and sacrifices were made. They were also social occasions for the participants.

"We all have knowledge" is a phrase that summarizes the argument that the Corinthians were using. The knowledge they had, according to verse four, was that "an idol is nothing... and that there is no other God but one."

They were *right* about the meal; but they were *wrong* about eating it without concern for how their behavior affected others. Paul answered them by saying "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies" – it builds-up.

Because we live in community, connected with other believers, I must temper my "knowledge by love.

1Co 8:2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.



You can be orthodox but arrogant. You don't know anything if you don't show love by preferring others over yourself. Paul will expand on love in chapter thirteen, saying,

1Co 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

1Co 13:2 And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

1Co 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

1Co 8:3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

Your relationship to God is a love relationship. You love Him; and you are “known” by Him - intimately, wonderfully, lovingly known to His heart. Paul was implying that if you are loved by God, and you love God, then you will show it by loving those whom God loves.

1Co 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one.

Paul agreed with their knowledge, but knowledge wasn't the real point.

1Co 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),

There were (and are) “so-called gods on earth, and in heaven:

- On earth, men craft idols to represent their gods. Even though Paul said, “an idol is nothing,” he will later add, “... the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons” (10:20). The idol may be “nothing” to you, but there can be a genuine demonic presence that ought not be taken lightly.
- “In heaven” is referring to real supernatural entities, like Satan and the principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age. In the Book of Job, we see that Satan still had access to Heaven. These

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supernatural foes war against us, and a pagan meal sacrificed to them is just the kind of foothold they are lost for.

1Co 8:6 yet for us *there is* one God, 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*.

Commentators see this as a kind of early Christian doctrinal creed. We can identify monotheism, creationism, the deity of Jesus, and redemption - just to name a few things.

Here it serves to underline what Paul was getting at. We have a familial relationship with God; He is our Father, making us brothers and sisters in Christ. He is Lord over all things, and in our lives. We thus have opportunity to love one another in the family under His lordship.

Paul applied their argument that there is one God. Since they believed it, they should act on it more for love than liberty.

1Co 8:7 However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

The “idol” may indeed be “nothing” to some, but not to others. To them, it is still, in some sense, idol worship. They cannot in good conscience eat in the temple restaurants. If they were to partake, it would “defile” them. “Defile” derives from a root word meaning *soiled*. We might say dirty. It would wound them, causing guilt for sinning against their conscience.

Leslie Nease was encouraged to participate in a Buddhist temple worship ritual. They told her it wasn’t religious. In the luau example... If you have the “knowledge” it’s nothing, that’s great. But don’t try to convince someone to attend who has doubts.

1Co 8:8 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.



Eating in the temples, or refusing to, “does not commend [you] to God.” In other words, it doesn’t make you more spiritual, or leave you less spiritual. These are personal issues to be decided in your heart between you and God. No one can or should overrule your conscience.

This is a very important point. You see, we tend to think of those who exercise greater liberty as being more mature, as being more spiritual. *Not necessarily so!* We likewise tend to think of someone without liberty in a certain questionable practice as being less mature, as being less spiritual. *Not necessarily so!* At least not from God’s perspective.

It’s important to realize this because often folks exercising liberty fool themselves into thinking they are growing when, in fact, they may be going backwards in their walk. Therefore they tend to want to flaunt their liberties and lead others into them.

Liberty is great; but the greatest is love.

## **#2 - You Have The Obligation To Not Be A Stumbling Block (v9-13)**

Westley would do anything for his precious Buttercup. His tests consist of his swordfight with Inigo, his wrestling match with Fezzik, and his battle of witlessness with Vizzini. Then there is the Fire Swamp and the Pit of Despair. All for *The Princess Bride*.

I’m sure we all agree with Paul’s analysis. Love triumphs over knowledge. Now the question becomes, “How far are you willing to go for the sake of love?”

1Co 8:9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.

They were at “liberty” to eat in an idol’s temple. It may not be advisable... But it was their choice. The real issue was whether or not their doing so would become a “stumbling-block” to those whose conscience prohibited them from doing likewise.

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“Stumbling-block” means actively encouraging the so-called “weaker” brother or sister to participate. It wasn’t just that some of them were still having pizza parties at Pan’s Place. It was that they were inviting the weaker brothers and sisters, and urging them to come and get over their reluctance.

To paraphrase what Paul said, “Don’t use your liberty carelessly in a way that leads a Christian still vulnerable to those old associations to backslide” (The Message).

1Co 8:10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?

Hmm. Is it just “seeing” them that is the problem? Here’s a perspective on that:

They seem to be urging others, whom Paul describes as people whose consciences are weak, to join them at these meals. This seems to be the best way to make sense of the fact that they “see” the “knowing ones” sitting at table (how could they “see” it if they were not present?). What is “destroying” them is the fact that they are under considerable pressure to accept - or have actually done so - the invitations of the “knowing ones.”

1Co 8:11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

Instead of seeing others as “weak” brothers and sisters, we must see them as those “for whom Christ died.” A Christian’s very life was at stake. They might “perish.”

That sounds serious; and it was... and it is. The brother or sister was probably a former idolater who was in danger of falling back into the grips of idolatry. They were being encouraged to return to the things Jesus had delivered them from.

They might “perish” by God killing them prematurely. This was happening in the first century church:

- In The Book of Acts, there is the example of Ananias and Saphira being struck dead for lying to God.

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- Later in First Corinthians chapter eleven we will hear about believers who were defiling the Lord's Supper becoming ill and even dying as a discipline.

1Co 8:12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

This sounds like Jesus saying to do something against one of the least is to do it against Him (Matthew 25:45). Or Hebrews 6:6, where to return to former sins is to crucify the Son of God all over again and hold him up to public disgrace.

Getting more technical, some commentators point out that the plural "brethren" might mean the entire body of believers in Corinth. Thus the ones with knowledge were sinning against all the believers as well as Jesus.

The ones with knowledge were in sin. Not for their liberty, but for their encouraging the weak to follow them. Because the weak are in Christ, people He died to set free - it is sin against Him.

1Co 8:13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Paul wasn't suggesting you go vegetarian. He was applying the principle of love triumphing over knowledge. The issue was foregoing your rights in order to edify other believers. It wasn't just the eating of meat; it was eating it in a way that was a stumbling-block. We've seen that means encouraging or urging the brother or sister to partake or to participate against their conscience.

Back to the Enchanted Tiki-Tiki-Tiki-Tiki-Tiki-Tiki-Tiki-Tiki Room. You have liberty to sit there and enjoy the show. You're in no danger of worshipping Wannahockalooogie.

If the believers you are with think it's demonic, don't encourage them to get over it. Don't act as if they are immature. Those are stumbling-blocks.





To that end, as much as it might be your favorite attraction - the must see on every visit to the Happiest Place on Earth - maybe skip it for the sake of loving others.

While we're on the subject, there is a difference between a stumbling-block and offending someone. A brother or sister without a clear conscience to participate in something doesn't always see it as a liberty. They think that if it is wrong for them, it is wrong for you.

I'd say they are offended, not stumbled, as long as you've not urged them to participate. Them being offended doesn't give them the right to tell you what you can and cannot do.

BUT - You might want to tone it down, or give it up, for the sake of love. Love sets limits on your liberty.

Genuine Christian maturity lies in thinking more about others than I do about myself. It lies in personal sacrifice for the sake of seeing others built-up in their faith in Jesus Christ.

If you think you're mature - Be mature and defer to love.

Maybe you've been stumbled. There's a scene from the film, *Chariots of Fire*, that comes to mind. One of Eric Liddell's competitors pushes him rounding a turn in their race, and he stumbles to the ground. "Get up, man, finish the race," mumbles the Italian coach to himself. Liddell gets up; he runs; he finishes and wins the race, head held characteristically high to suggest he runs for God's glory.

- Don't push your brothers or sisters to stumble off the narrow way.
- If you've stumbled, get up man; finish the race for God's glory.

