

The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians

Liberty that is Limited by Love

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1. A Possession of Knowledge

The Christian church of the first century had to operate within cultures that, with the exception of the Jews, had numerous gods, activities, and festivals that were intertwined in almost all aspects of society. For many who were saved out of pagan idolatry, there was a slow road of coming out from under the sway of their old practices (1 Cor. 8:7). Paul repeatedly addressed concerns surrounding eating foods that were, or might have been, involved in some form of pagan worship (cf. 1 Cor. 10:25ff; Rom. 14:1ff). God has always treated pagan idolatry with derision and scorn (Ex 12:12; 2 Ki 18:27; cf. Isa 44:9-20; Jer. 10:14; Hab. 2:19), and Paul noted that, in some cases, idols might be animated by demons who themselves are under the authority of God (1 Cor. 10:19-20; cf. Mark 5:6-13).

2. A Danger of Arrogance

Paul has already charged the Corinthians with arrogance (1 Cor 4:18; 5:2), and he now reminds them that knowledge alone results in arrogance. The knowledge of someone whom God knows is characterized by love for Him and by love for others (Mark 10:28-31; 1 John 4:11-12). Knowledge of what is true is vitally important. Without knowledge of the truth, men cannot be saved (John 8:32). But knowledge alone is insufficient, both for salvation and for maturity (Mark. 12:34; cf. Jam. 2:19). Salvation requires knowledge coupled with a repentant faith (Rom. 10:9-10), and Christian maturity also requires love (1 Cor. 13:2ff). Acting in the freedom of Christ based on knowledge alone that is not buffered by love for others can result in the ruining of a fellow believe (1 Cor. 8:11).

3. A Necessity of Love

Christians are to strive to be able to enjoy the limits of their Christian freedom while limiting the exercise of their freedom out of love for one another (James 2:12-13). Using our freedom in Christ in a way that discounts the concerns of someone who has a weak knowledge of their freedom is harmful to both believers (Rom. 14:23; 1 Cor. 8:12), and it displays a lack of true knowledge in the person who professes to possess considerable knowledge.