

1 Corinthians 8

I. The Problem of Food Sacrificed to Idols

- A. The issue of food sacrificed to idols was a major problem in the early church.
1. The problem is discussed in the New Testament from Acts to Revelation. Paul devotes a significant portion of this letter to the issue, and we can infer from his discussion that he considered it in an earlier letter to the Corinthians as well.
 2. Sacrifice to the gods was an integral part of ancient life. It might be of two kinds, private or public. In neither case was the whole animal consumed on the altar. Often all that was burned was a mere token part as small as some of the hairs cut from the forehead.
 3. In private sacrifice, the animal was divided into three parts. First, a token part was burned on the altar. Second, the priests received a portion, and third, the worshiper received the remainder, with which he would give a banquet, often to celebrate an event such as a wedding. Sometimes the banquet was in the house of the host, and other times it was in the temple of the god to whom the sacrifice had been made.
 4. A papyrus invitation to one such banquet has been found, and it reads: "Antonius, son of Ptolemaeus, invites you to dine with him at the table of our Lord Serapis." Serapis was the god to whom the sacrifice had been made. (Now before we even get into Chapter 8, what would you expect Paul to say about such an invitation?)
 5. In public sacrifice, the animal was offered by the state, with the first two portions being the same, but the third portion now going to the local magistrates and other public officials. What they did not need, they sold to the shops and the markets. Thus, any meat in a local shop could very well have come from an idol sacrifice, but the buyer wouldn't know unless he was told.
 6. To avoid all contact with idolatry in a city steeped in idolatry demanded an uncompromising devotion that the world failed to comprehend and that unbelievers disparaged as antisocial, subversive fanaticism.
 7. Social meals in temples could not be purely secular or only nominally connected to idolatry because the god or gods were intended to be honored by the meal and were considered to be present. This description immediately brings to mind the Lord's supper -- and Paul will deal with that issue in these chapters.

8. The situation must have been especially difficult for Erastus, who Romans 16:23 tells us was the city's director of public works in Corinth.

B. In Acts 15, the apostles met in Jerusalem and prepared a letter to Gentile Christians that dealt in part with this very issue.

1. Acts 15:28-29 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.
2. Notice that this letter from Jerusalem mentions the same two items that are at issue in the Corinthian church, and it forbids both. However we interpret these chapters, I submit our interpretation will be wrong if it contradicts this letter from the apostles that was delivered by the author of the letter we are now studying. And if we conclude that Paul thought idol meat was a matter of expediency, then what about fornication? Both are prohibited with the same language in the Jerusalem letter.

C. The real issue here was whether they could eat meat in a temple dedicated to an idol.

1. The problem really had three parts, and Paul deals with each part.
 - a) Eating food sacrificed to an idol at the temple of an idol. (8:7-13, 10:1-22)
 - b) Eating food of unknown history that is bought at the market. (10:23-27)
 - c) Eating food in the private homes of unbelievers. (10:28-31)
 - d) The first issue is the main issue. The other two are secondary, and Paul deals with them at the end of Chapter 10.
2. For the most part the Gentile Christians in Corinth had probably attended temple meals all their lives. It was the basic restaurant in antiquity, and every kind of occasion was celebrated there.
3. The problem was likely that after their conversion, and most likely after the departure of Paul, some of them had returned to the practice of attending these cultic temple meals. Paul, it seems, had prohibited it, but they had raised three objections to Paul's teaching on the subject:
 - a) Objection #1: They all have knowledge about idols. They knew an idol was nothing. How could Paul accuse them of idolatry when they knew the idol was nothing?

- b) Objection #2: They all have knowledge about food. All food is clean; it doesn't matter what we eat. So how can it matter where we eat it?
 - c) Objection #3: Paul really had no authority to tell them what to do. Why? Because he didn't accept any support from them while he was there; he was not "on the staff" so to speak. Plus, he compromised with regard to food sold in the marketplace, so why can't he compromise on this too? (This third objection is treated in Chapter 9.)
4. To answer these objections, Paul responds with three primary arguments:
- a) Argument #1: Their attitude and behavior portrays a basic misunderstanding about the nature of Christian ethics and about the interplay of rights, knowledge, and love, which he addresses in Chapter 8.
 - b) Argument #2: Their objections portray a basic misunderstanding of Paul's apostolic authority, which he defends vigorously in Chapter 9.
 - c) Argument #3: Their rationalizations portray a basis misunderstanding about the true nature of idolatry, which he addresses in Chapter 10.
5. For such "knowledgeable" people, these Corinthians certainly had a lot of basic misunderstandings!
6. What is Chapter 8 NOT about?
- a) The issue is not that of offending someone in the church. Rather it has to do with conduct that another would emulate, and perhaps was even being encourage to emulate, to his or her own hurt. The weak were not being offended; they were being led astray and destroyed.
 - b) The issue is not that of peripheral matters of opinion. Idolatry is not a matter of opinion. No Christian has the freedom to dabble with idolatry.

II. The Traditional View of 1 Corinthians 8

- A. The traditional view assumes that Paul agreed theologically with the strong.
- 1. This view is called the "traditional" view simply because most commentators have adopted it.
 - 2. Under this view, Paul agrees with the strong that they are technically correct, but he reproaches them for using their freedom in an unloving matter. But loving or not, under this view Paul agrees that the strong have the freedom in Christ to eat meat in an idol's temple. Under this view, his command to flee

idolatry applied only to the weak. This view also suggests that Paul disagreed with the apostolic letter of Acts 15.

3. One immediate problem with this view is that it revolves around a group labeled "strong" when the term "strong" never appears anywhere in Paul's discussion of idol food in this letter. "It is basically a misnomer that falsely implies that they possess a certain strength of faith or more mature insight and that Paul fully agrees with their position."

III. Other Problems with the Traditional View

A. One error with the traditional view is that it often assumes that Chapters 8-10 constitute Paul's first words to the Corinthians on this subject. That cannot possibly be true.

1. It is inconceivable that this letter would be the first time that Paul had discussed this issue with the Corinthians. Idolatry was one of the earliest and most pressing issues confronting new converts in these cities full of false gods. (**Acts 17:16** Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.)
2. One can hardly imagine Paul ever preaching a sermon that did not address idolatry. He frequently addressed the topic in Acts, even to the point of sparking riots and persecution. He had an uncompromising attitude toward idolatry. Indeed, just a few chapters ago in 6:9 he said that idolaters would not inherit the kingdom of heaven.
3. It must be the case that Paul addressed this topic while he was in Corinth, and it is almost certainly the case that he addressed it in his previous correspondence. What that means is that Chapters 8-10 are part of an ongoing discussion, and we should interpret them in that light.
4. We also know this from Paul's style in these chapters. His answer is vigorous and combative, hardly the kind of response one would expect if they had simply rendered an internal question on which they asked him to render a decision.

B. A second error is to view these chapters as the result of an honest inquiry by Corinthians who were wondering what Paul's opinion was on this issue.

1. I think everyone concerned -- both the weak and the strong -- were perfectly aware of Paul's views on these topics. The problem was that some had rejected his apostolic authority, and thus rejected his teaching on this issue.
2. They were not asking "Can we eat idol food?" but "Why can't we eat idol

food?"

3. Some of the Corinthians probably had constructed clever arguments from bits and pieces of Paul's earlier teaching on this and other subjects and had wrenched those teachings out of context. How could Paul be prohibiting such conduct -- wouldn't that require them to leave the world completely as they argued in 5:10? After all, the idol worship was just meaningless religious mumbo jumbo. Right? It couldn't have any effect on truly spiritual people who were filled with so much knowledge. Right?

C. A third error is to view Paul as agreeing that any Christian had the freedom to eat food in a temple dedicated to idol worship.

1. The theme of this entire discussion is "Flee idolatry!" It is inconceivable that Paul would have sanctioned any participation in anything idolatrous, even if it was only "nominally" idolatrous. In 10:28 Paul will maintain that food takes on a religious quality if a person says that it does.
2. One commentator wrote: "The Jerusalem Council stipulated that Gentile Christians were to abstain from food sacrificed to idols. But in Corinth, Paul allowed Christians to enter a temple and participate in feasts held in one of its dining rooms. Paul's consent in this chapter appears to be contradictory, especially because he forbade the eating of sacrificial meat in 10:14-22." He later explains away the contradiction by arguing that "In Chapter 8 Paul addresses the strong but in chapter 10 the weak."
 - a) But the word "weak" appears nowhere in Chapter 10. Are we to believe that Paul's command to flee from idolatry in 10:14 applies only to the weak? Do we really think there was a group of Christians in Corinth who were so strong that they did not need to flee from idolatry? And are we to believe that the strong group included the arrogant, loveless Christians in Chapter 8? And where did Paul give the strong or anyone else permission to enter an idol's temple and eat?
 - b) An where is the verse where Paul allows anyone to enter a temple and eat idol food? The closest might be verse 9 where Paul refers to "this right of yours," but from the context in Chapters 8 and 10 it is almost impossible to conclude that Paul thought they actually had that right.
 - (1) The Greek word for "right" or "liberty" used here denotes the power or authority to do a thing, and the Corinthians had no doubt argued to Paul that they had that power or authority. Paul's message in Chapter 8 is that if you really have that right, then you had better be careful with it. His message in Chapter 10 is that you don't really have that right to begin with.
 - c) The issue here is not one of Christian freedom. The Corinthians thought they had the freedom to eat in an idol's temple, and they had taken some

of Paul's earlier teaching on other subjects out of context to justify their actions. Paul's message in these chapters is that no one has the freedom to eat in an idol's temple. Instead, they must flee idolatry.

- d) If Paul is agreeing that people may eat food in an idol's temple while simultaneously fleeing from idolatry, then what about this argument: Why can't we go to a theatre where a pornographic movie is being shown if all we want to do while there is eat popcorn with some friends? Don't we have that freedom? No we do not. Why? Because the same Bible that tells us to flee idolatry also tells us to flee fornication.
- e) Here's another question. If it is okay for anyone to eat in an idol's temple, then why did Paul tell them in Chapter 10 not to eat idol meat in any situation if someone told them where it came from. How could there be any doubt about the source of meat when it was being consumed in the actual temple where it was sacrificed?

D. A fourth error may be the assumption that there is a dispute among the weak and the strong in Corinth.

1. Paul never once refers to anyone as "strong" in Chapters 8-10. And although he uses the term "weak," he never addresses anyone from this weak group. He doesn't mention the weak at all when he starts giving specific instructions in Chapter 10.
2. Who are the weak and the strong?
 - a) A preliminary question is who is calling them weak? Some argue that the letter to which Paul is responding was written by those who considered themselves strong and who complained about their more scrupulous "weak" brethren. They wanted Paul to urge the weak to get with it and enter the world of spiritual freedom enjoyed by those who possessed true knowledge. Perhaps they even argued that eating idol food would "build up" the weak on the matter of their freedom in Christ.
 - (1) We have no evidence that the so-called strong created this "weak" label. And there is also no evidence that any of these weaker Christians had ever objected to the actions of the so-called strong. In fact, Paul's concern is just the opposite. He fears that the weak will follow the others to eat in the idol temples.
 - (2) As an aside, to qualify as "weak" one must have a weak moral compass and be susceptible to being led astray by a bad example. Many in the church who claim to be "the weak brother" and use that status as a club on others would be the first to tell you they would never follow that bad example. That admission tell us they may be right in what they are condemning, but they are not condemning it as a weak brother. The truly weak brother would be probably be the last person to stand up and object to what was going on, and

that is why they are called weak.

- b)** Other argue that these Christians with weak consciences were hypothetical. Verse 7, however, does not sound like a hypothetical group to me, and it is would hardly be surprising to find weak Christians in Corinth.
- 3.** Paul's entire approach in this chapter assumes that the so-called strong would care about the plight of one with a weak conscience. If there were an intense debate raging between the strong and the weak over this issue, the so-called strong would have already shown a lack of regard for the weak. Paul seems to assume that they had not really considered the affect of their actions on the weak, and that once they did they would change that behavior.

E. A fifth error is the assumption that Romans 14 is a parallel passage.

- 1.** Romans 14 certainly has some similarities and uses similar language. It also deals with food and deals with the strong versus the weak, but there are some important differences.
- 2.** The two interacting groups are different.
 - a)** Romans deals with social interactions between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians.
 - (1)** This issue was an important one in the early church, but it is not the issue under consideration here.
 - (2)** Paul scolded Peter and Barnabas in Galatians 2:11-14 for their refusal to eat with Gentile Christians in Antioch. The issue was between Christian and Christian and the danger was dividing the church into a Gentile church and a Jewish church.
 - b)** 1 Corinthians deals with a very different issue: social interactions between Gentile Christians and idol worshipers.
 - (1)** We know that Gentiles are the only people addressed here because no Jew would ever be caught dead eating in a Greek temple. Also, 8:7 says that these people were until now accustomed to idols -- and that could never be said about a Jew.
 - c)** The fact that Paul rejected narrow Jewish dietary restrictions that separated Jewish Christians from Gentiles Christians within the church does not mean that Paul also rejected restrictions that separated Christians from idol worshipers. In fact in 10:14 he will tell them all to flee idolatry!
 - d)** It is a mistake to assume that just because Paul agreed with the strong in

Romans 14 he must have also agreed with the strong in 1 Corinthians 8-10. In fact, we know that he did not agree with them -- not here in Chapter 8 and certainly not in Chapter 10.

3. The word "conscience" never appears in Romans 14, and the word "faith" does not appear in 1 Corinthians 8-10.
 4. A key word in 1 Corinthians 8-10 is the Greek word for right, liberty, or authority. It does not appear in Romans 14.
 5. In Romans 14, Paul sides with the strong, agreeing in 14:20 that all foods are clean. He sees no harm in their eating the food apart from its potential effect on the weak. By contrast, Paul completely rejects the argument that it is okay to eat in an idol's temple, even branding it a deadly communion with demons in Chapter 10.
 6. In Romans 14:5-6, Paul says that both the one who eats and the one who abstains give thanks to God and honor God. Can food offered to an idol and eaten in an idol's temple give honor to God? No. The one who is honored is the false idol.
 7. But that is not to say Romans 14 is unrelated to these chapters. Paul very likely taught the Corinthians the same lessons that he taught the Romans, and they it seems had taken that teaching out of context and applied it to idol food.
 - a) You can almost hear them: "Paul, you told us that the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking." (Romans 14:17) Thus, we can eat idol food, and if we can eat the food how could it possibly matter where we eat it? "Paul, you said 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.'" (Romans 14:22) "That is our position with the idol food. Are you telling us now we shouldn't be happy?"
 8. One final similarity between the two discussions is that the potential result on the weak brother is the same -- it could cause him to be lost. Either through division and discouragement in Romans, or through idolatry in 1 Corinthians.
- F. A sixth error is assuming that Paul's only problem with eating idol food was its potential harm to those with a weak conscience.**
1. But how can that be an error when Paul leads off with that very argument? Paul leads with that argument because he is interested in persuasion rather than coercion. He wants them to flee from idols, but he also wants them to understand the theological implications of their behavior and the requirement that love be the motivation for their behavior.
 2. We can infer that Paul had earlier tried the approach of leading with coercion,

and it did not seem to have worked very well. They rejected his authority and his command.

a) He is talking here to people who know very well his view about idolatry. He is trying to persuade them to adopt that view even though they already know it and have already rejected it. He did not start off in Chapter 8 by telling them to flee idolatry because he had already tried that approach and it hadn't worked! Not only were they not fleeing, but they were eating dinner in the idol's temple!

3. Paul is very capable of giving them an absolute prohibition but he does not do that in Chapter 8. Instead, he first wants them to decide for themselves that their actions are wrong. The absolute prohibition comes later in Chapter 10 where he commands them to flee from idolatry and connects idol food with demons.

4. In Chapter 10, Paul will forbid them from eating in pagan temples. He will forbid them from eating food that has been openly acknowledged as having been offered to an idol. He will permit idol food to be purchased but only as long as its history has not been disclosed. He will permit eating idol food with pagan friends, but only as long as its history has not been announced.

G. A seventh error (not limited to just the traditional approach) is to view this problem as a purely ancient problem with no relevance in our modern world.

1. "To advise the Chinese not to offer food and not eat the food in ancestor worship may be implicitly advising them not to love their parents and ultimately not to be Chinese."

2. There are also parallels in our own society. There are many activities and places in our modern world where Christians should absolutely not be. Places we have no right to be. Why? Because of the damage it could do to weaker Christians, and because it puts us right in the middle of a sinful situation that we could so easily have avoided.

IV. 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

A. 1 Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up.

1. While Paul will finally forbid them from going to the temples, he does not begin that way. Rather than starting with an imperative, he first wants to correct the serious theological misunderstanding that led them to commit and then justify their bad behavior. Rules work well up until the point where something arises that is not covered by the rules. If Paul can correct their

flawed understanding of the Christian life then perhaps they will be ready when the next big issue arises and will be able to determine what they must do even without having been given a rule by Paul.

2. Paul is not an enemy of knowledge. He is an enemy of knowledge that is not informed by faith or directed by love. Knowledge is not the ground of Christian behavior, love is. We do not think of love and knowledge as natural opposites, and they are not. But Paul is dealing with an attitude that places knowledge above all else. They know that an idol is nothing and that all food is clean, and thus they can eat food in an idol temple without regard to anyone else, and particularly without regard for those who don't share their advanced knowledge.
3. Knowledge is a requirement of our salvation. We must know that Jesus is the Son of God, we must know that we are dead in sin apart from him, and we must know what we must do to be saved. Apart from knowledge, we will die in our sins and be eternally lost. But knowledge alone is not enough; it is necessary but not sufficient.
4. Knowledge puffs up. In that condition, it is like a balloon filled with hot air. The word "puffed up" occurs seven times in the New Testament, six times in this letter. Love, by contrast, *builds* up. Love is "the mortar between the bricks of the Christian building."
5. This entire section of the letter is a perfect example of the proper interplay between love and knowledge. Paul, of course, has knowledge about what they must do, but he does not simply force that knowledge upon them by issuing an apostolic mandate. Instead, he begins by reasoning with them as a father would to a child, trying to get them to see what they should do as they begin to understand the implications of their behavior.
6. Example: Why can't I go to the dance club or the night club or the bar? There are two approaches to answering that question. The first would be to quote scriptures about sober, holy, righteous living. The second would be to explain how it would look to a weaker Christian, fresh from the world, who saw you go into that night club or bar. Both approaches are sound, but they are different in their appeal. Paul uses both approaches in these chapters, but he begins with the second.
7. Some have taken this verse out of context to argue that knowledge is not important. If Paul agreed with that proposition, then why was he writing this letter at all? The whole point of this letter is to tell these Corinthian know-it-alls that there were many things they did not know and that they needed to know.
 - a) In Hosea 4:6, God said "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee." And people

today can also be destroyed for lack of knowledge. What you don't know can kill you.

- b)** These Corinthians had a mere surface knowledge of Christianity and yet they thought they knew all they needed to know. That attitude is with us yet. Many Christians today are like a duck paddling across the surface of a large lake, taking in only an inch of water and completely unaware of the fathomless depths that lie beneath.
- c)** In Psalm 119:162, the Psalmist wrote "I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." There is not a better description of Bible study to be found anywhere in or out of the Bible.
 - (1)** The more you know, the more you know that you don't know. It has been said that when you think you know everything they give you a bachelor's degree. When you realize you don't know anything they give you a Master's degree. And when you realize no one else knows anything either, they give you a Ph.D.
 - (2)** No matter how much you know or how much you think you know about the Bible, there is an infinite amount yet to discover. And if anyone thinks he knows all he can, he really knows nothing yet.
- d)** But saying that there is always more that we can know is not the same as saying that there is nothing we can know. The Bible tells us just the opposite. In fact, Jesus said in John 8:32, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." That promise would be hollow indeed if we were unable to know the truth.
- e)** Paul is not fighting knowledge in these verses. Instead, he is fighting the same thing he has been fighting since the first chapter of this letter -- arrogance.

B. 2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

- 1.** These people had everything all worked out. They knew all that they needed to know, and they did not need instructions from Paul or from anyone else. They would have been perfectly happy to give Paul a crash course on Christian freedom, but there was nothing he could teach them on that subject.
- 2.** In their minds being spiritual meant to have received gnosis or knowledge, meaning probably that the Spirit had given them special knowledge. Paul does not tell them that they don't really know anything at all -- he tells them they don't know as they ought to know. There is something missing.

3. Paul basically agrees with their knowledge -- there is one God, idols are not real (although Paul will point to a reality behind those false gods in Chapter 10), and food is not a matter of importance to God. But Paul knows that what they are doing with that knowledge is dead wrong.
4. "The tyranny of knowledge as the basis of Christian ethics has a long and unfortunate history in the church." Once we understand something, there is always a temptation to use it as a club on others. We must always preach the truth, but we must always preach the truth with love. (Ephesians 4:15) Knowledge must always lead to love. Knowledge without love tends to lead one to becoming filled with pride and being puffed up rather than to living a better Christian life.

C. 3 But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

1. Those who love are known by God.
 - a) 2 Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.
 - b) Galatians 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?
 - c) 1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
 - d) Citizens living in a kingdom all know the king, but the king does not know all of them. That is not true in the church. We know the king, and the king knows us.
2. Some of the earliest manuscripts read "If anyone loves, this one truly knows."
 - a) "This reading fits the context so perfectly that it is either the Pauline original or else the work of an editorial genius. ... The shorter text brings Paul's point home so powerfully that it is most likely what he originally wrote."
 - b) But could the word "God" really have been added by a very early editor. It is possible. There are numerous minor differences among the Greek manuscripts. But before we get too much on our high horse about it we should look at the translations we ourselves carry around. Some of them, such as the NIV, make much more drastic editorial changes than this to the Bible, but do so in the name of translation. As far as this verse goes,

either reading is certainly true, but the shorter one fits the context better.

3. One final point on the "knowledge" issue is that we see here in Corinth the beginnings of the gnostic heresy that would soon become a tremendous problem in the early church as reflected in the epistles of John. The Greek word for knowledge (gnosis) occurs six times in the first three verses of this chapter.
 - a) The Gnostics saw themselves as the truly spiritual and knowledgeable elite. They came to see the material world as corrupt and evil, which caused them to deny that Jesus had come in the flesh. Only the spirit mattered. The Gnostics taught that there was a special secret knowledge that was communicated over and above the revelation that was communicated in the Bible. The nature of that knowledge varied greatly amongst the different Gnostic sects, but was almost invariably characterized as "secret" or "hidden."
 - b) We are suffering today from this same heresy. How? Because in their quest to come up with secret knowledge they would make things up and put them in their secret gospels. The Da Vinci Code is based on the Gnostic heresies.

D. 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.

1. The Corinthians were correct that idols have no real existence. The Psalmist told us the same thing:
 - a) Psalm 115:4-8 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: 6 They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: 7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. 8 They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.
2. Since there is no reality to an idol because there is no God but one, how can anyone be faulted for eating meals at the temples, since the gods represented by those temples do not even exist?
 - a) As Paul will explain in Chapter 10, that premise is only partly true. The idols are nothing, but there is something very real standing behind those

idols -- pagan religion is the locus of demonic activity. John broadens that point and makes it even stronger in the book of Revelation where he twice refers to the *synagogue* of Satan and refers to a Greek shrine as Satan's throne. Deuteronomy 32:15-17 also speaks of idol worship as a sacrifice to demons.

- b)** The false gods at issue here were the Greek gods that we know from Greek mythology. Did you ever wonder where Greek mythology came from? There is a fascinating book cited on our web page that argues the Greek gods were based on a false view of the historical characters in the Bible. While the Bible presents the true history of mankind before the flood, this book argues that some after the flood told a different story about the same historical figures but from a reversed perspective, and this different story became the Greek mythology that we know today. A fascinating book, which if true, offers a remarkable confirmation of the truthfulness of the scripture and also provides an even more compelling basis for the enmity that must exist between these false Greek idols and the followers of the one true God.
- 3.** Verse 6 tells us four things about God that are fundamental to our Christian faith.
- a)** First, God is our Father.
 - (1)** This concept of God existed in Judaism before Christ came, but no one really understand what it meant until Jesus explained it. Through Jesus we can understand and can enjoy that personal relationship with God, our Father.
 - b)** Second, God is our Creator.
 - (1)** Unlike all of the false gods, the one true God stands apart from the natural world because he is the source of the natural world. He created the materials from which those false gods are constructed.
 - c)** Third, Jesus the Lord is equal with God the Father.
 - (1)** In the same breath that Paul asserts there is only one God, he applies the designation "Lord" to Jesus -- a designation that in the Old Testament was applied only to God. Jesus is God, and no one with an understanding of the Old Testament could read this verse and come to any other conclusion.
 - d)** Fourth, it is through God and for God that we exist.
 - (1)** This statement is not just a creed; it is a personalized creed. Paul points to all creation, but he also focuses on the new creation, the church. We exist through God and we exist for God.

E. 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. 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.

1. The word "conscience" appears 20 times in Paul's letters, eight of which are in chapters 8 and 10. It refers to a moral compass. A weak conscience is one that is unable to make appropriate moral choices. It refers to someone who can easily be led astray.
 - a) This is the first instance of the word "conscience" in the New Testament, and it is one of the few words in Paul's theological vocabulary that seems to have come from his Greek rather than his Jewish background.
2. Look at verse 7. How could anyone be a Christian and not possess this knowledge?
 - a) It appears that not every believer in Corinth had full knowledge of the doctrines of God, of Christ, and of creation that Paul had just expounded.
 - b) I have known people who agonized over whether they knew enough when they were baptized. They worry that their baptism didn't count because they didn't know enough. Some are even re-baptized. What do we need to know to be saved? Read Acts 2. Peter's listeners in that chapter were baptized after hearing only one gospel sermon, which in fact was the first gospel sermon. If you want to know what you need to know, read that chapter. If you worry that you don't know enough, ask yourself what those thousands of believers knew on that day of Pentecost. They knew that Jesus was the Son of God. They knew he had been raised from the dead. They knew they were lost in their sins without him. And they knew that they needed to repent and be baptized to be saved. If you knew and believed that, then you knew enough. But after 20 years if that is still all you know, then you do have a problem.
3. Some have seen a contradiction between verse 1 ("all of us possess knowledge") and verse 7 ("not all possess this knowledge"), but of course there is no contradiction.
 - a) The statement in verse 1 is likely a Corinthian slogan that Paul agrees with to a point. Verses 2 and 7 are qualifications to the general statement in verse 1.
 - b) Also, verse 7 likely includes knowledge at an experiential, emotional level rather than an intellectual level. The weak Christians knew intellectually that an idol was nothing, but they had believed differently for years and their former way of life was woven into their consciousness and emotions.

It was difficult for them to return to the place where they had practiced idolatry for so many years and not maintain some of their old beliefs and associations. They were having trouble coping with the dissonance between their heads and their hearts, and the danger was that the conflict could lead them back into idolatry and thus destroy them. They were like a former alcoholic who fights an inner battle every time he comes in contact with alcohol.

4. Paul agrees with the Corinthians that food is a matter of indifference to God. We will not be commended to God based on what we eat. But the irony of course is that this food was far from a matter of indifference to the Corinthians! In fact it was so important to them that it appeared they were willing to place it even above the eternal destiny of their fellow Christians.

F. 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.

1. Verse 11 is a strong challenge to these Corinthians who thought they had the right to eat in an idol's temple. What they were doing could cause another Christian to be eternally lost.
2. The issue here does not revolve around the one with the weak conscience. Paul's goal is to change the behavior of the so-called strong, who despite their imagined spiritual sophistication and superiority are in danger of being partners with demons.
3. The net effect of this chapter is to prohibit eating food in an idol's temple. Some have argued that if there were no weak brothers to witness the activity, then the others had the freedom to eat the idol meat in the temple, but we know that cannot be the case -- in chapter 10, Paul will tell them that such actions involve fellowship with demons.
 - a) The Corinthians were in danger of causing other Christians to fall back into idolatry and lose their eternal life. The Corinthian church was engaged in a battle with idolatry and immorality, but some were consorting with the enemy and others were being killed by friendly fire.
 - b) Paul reminds them that the person they are endangering is a person for whom Christ died. He is contrasting the Corinthians' loveless knowledge

with the greatest love imaginable.

- c) Further, as verse 12 tells us, they were sinning against Christ by their actions. The church is the body of Christ, and those who harm the body sin against Christ. By causing some to reject Christ and return to their former lives of sin they were causing them to crucify Jesus all over again and hold him up to public disgrace. (Hebrews 6:6)
 - d) Paul knew what it meant to sin against Christ. Jesus had asked him on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4)
 - e) "The ultimate wrong of the gnostic is not simply that he lacks true knowledge, nor even that he is responsible for the loss of a brother, bad as that is, but that in so doing he is directly sinning against Christ himself. The net result of such an argument, of course, is prohibition."
4. Why then did Paul begin with this argument in Chapter 8 when he will end up in Chapter 10 with a strict prohibition? Why not just start with the rule that he will later give?
- a) Paul started this way because that is how the Corinthians started. Paul works his way through their argument point by point and shows that Christian ethics and theology move in an entirely different direction.
 - b) Paul's response here also fits perfectly the pattern he uses elsewhere in the letter. In other situations he ended with a prohibition but only after first seeking to correct the problem at a deeper level, namely at the level of their misunderstanding of the gospel. With Paul, the imperative often follows the indicative.
 - c) Sexual immorality is wrong and absolutely so. Idolatry is wrong and absolutely so. But Paul never begins there. The Christian life is not determined by a list of rules and prohibitions. That is what religion had become for the Pharisees, and they now spent all their time trying to find loopholes. Paul wanted to avoid a follow up letter in which the Corinthians would ask him about 1000 special cases trying to find a loophole. Some things are totally incompatible with a life in Christ, and a true follower of Christ will flee from those things.