

Studies in 1 Corinthians

Lesson XXII: *Puffed Up or Built Up?*

TEXT: 1 COR. 8:1-13 (NIV)

1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.^[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. **2** The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. **3** But the man who loves God is known by God.

4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. **5** For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), **6** yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

7 But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. **8** But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. **10** For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? **11** So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. **12** When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. **13** Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Footnotes: a. Or "*We all possess knowledge,*" as you say

Introduction

In this chapter, Paul tackles a festering issue in Corinthian congregation: whether it was right for a Christian to eat meat that had been used in pagan rituals to the Greco-Roman gods. Bible commentator Albert Barnes explains: "When those sacrifices were made to heathen gods, a part of the animal was given to the priest that officiated, a part was consumed on the altar, and a part (probably the principal

part) was the property of him who offered it. This part was either eaten by him at home, as food which had been in some sense consecrated or blessed by having been offered to an idol; or it was partaken of at a feast in honour of the idol; or it was in some instances exposed for sale in the market, in the same way as other meat. Whether, therefore, it would be right to partake of that food, either when invited to the house of a heathen friend, or when it was exposed for sale in the market, was a question which could not but present itself to a conscientious Christian. The *objection* to partaking of it would be, that to partake of it either in the temples or at the feasts of their heathen neighbours, would be to lend their countenance to idolatry. On the other hand, there were many who supposed that it was always lawful, and that the scruples of their brethren were needless." (*accessed online at www.studylight.org*)

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Why do Christians sometimes disagree? A very old axiom declares, "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, unity. In all things, charity." How do we determine which matters are "essential" and which are "non-essential," especially as it concerns our fellowship with one another? (cf. Romans 14)
2. How does the principle "Knowledge puff up, but love builds up" (vs. 1b) apply to disputes of all kinds (including discussion about doctrine)? According to vv 1-3, what is the wrong way to respond to someone without the same "knowledge" that we have? What is the right way? What is the most important thing to uphold?
3. When a sacrifice was made to a deity of the ancient world, the *daemon* of that god was believed to enter into the sacrificial meal. Thus, anyone who ate that food was said to have taken the spirit of the deity upon them. How does Paul refute this notion in vv 4-6?
4. If demon-possession was not a risk of eating meat sacrificed to idols second-hand, what *was* the real risk involved in partaking? (see vv 7; 9-11)
5. What principle does the Holy Spirit lay down in vv 12-13 to guide our decision making with others in mind? Practically speaking, how does this apply to 21st century Christians?