

“I Will Not Cause My Brother To Stumble”

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“Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.” (1 Cor. 8:7)

Read 1 Cor. 8:7-13

The passage before us is one of the primary texts on Christian Liberty. The questions, “What can I do” and “What may I do” echo through its verses. Just because you can does not mean you should and just because you should does not mean you will.

The text verifies the idea that “food offered to idols” has no intrinsic demerit. There is nothing in the food that makes it morally wrong. In fact, Paul goes on to note how even the object to which the food is offered is not a real god and has no real existence. Thus, the object of the offering cannot contaminate the food offered. Paul continues by noting how not all people have this knowledge and if the knowledge possessed is wrongly used, then it has the potential of causing another person to stumble.

Either eating or not eating will not make one any more or less spiritual. The attitude toward the action, however, is the issue. The scenario is interesting. In verse ten the picture is painted of one who eats meat offered to idols in an idol’s temple. While eating he is seen by one who would not have eaten but now eats because of the actions of the other, and in so doing violates his conscience.

It should be noted that a person’s conscience erects a standard based on their information base. The information might be wrong or inadequate and thus the standard built by their conscience is wrong, yet the conscience is still functioning in a commending or condemning role. Another person's conscience may not be violated because what they are doing is not wrong. It is only wrong because of misinformation and thus by a person acting contrary to their conscience it is wrong.

There are two thoughts that need to be addressed. **First**, the one who has liberty must be careful in the exercising of their liberty so that they do not do it in such a way as to violate the conscience of the person who does not have this liberty. As an individual, I should guard the exercising of my liberty so as not to violate the conscience of those whose conscience is weak (vv. 7, 12). This is an individual matter. It is not a corporate issue as a fellowship.

Second, the one who does not have this liberty must endeavor to inform their mind so as to erect a different standard in their conscience. What they consider to be wrong is not wrong. It is only wrong, because they think it is wrong.

Now, in this discussion it is important to remember that we are not dealing with "real" sin. We are not talking about “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness,

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carousing, and things like these (Gal. 5:19-21).” There is no “Christian Liberty” in these things. Grace is not giving me the liberty to engage in sinful actions with divine sanction.

However, in our culture and context there are "things" that because of our background are wrong for us to partake in and thus should be avoided for us. But it is wrong for us to impose our "standard of behavior" on others in areas that are not in themselves sinful. If we are not careful in this area, we will become Pharisaical and ungracious.

This passage is a beautiful picture of a fellowship that is ruled by grace. It is our desire that in every action we endeavor to display a spirit of graciousness that supersedes personal preferences. It is our desire to live under the reign of His grace.

A grace spirit is being able to delight in the delight of others even when I do not delight in it. This is seen when you delight in the delight of a child who has received a special gift even though the gift has no real delight for you. You are simply delighting in their delight. This is the spirit of grace. This is where we as the people of God need to grow. To delight in the simple delight of others who are delighting in their personal preferences even when the preference might not be mine. May this be WBC.