

# CCLEB SERMON NOTES

SUNDAY JULY 14, 2024  
1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13

PASTOR DUANE MILLER

## IDOL MEAT, PRIDE, & LOVE



Today's passage begins the third of five essays that Paul wrote in what we call 1 Corinthians - Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

The first two essays were "Divisions and problems caused by following man, not following Christ." and "Divisions and problems, RE: sex". The third essay title is "Divisions and problems, RE: food". As you can see each essay or section of this letter, is about 3 -4 chapters. Now remember, there were no chapter breaks in the original manuscripts, thus the literary structure itself, how things were written, changes in topics, etc. informed the readers of when there was change in essay. You will see that clearly in the opening line of Chapter 8 verse 1.

- this is no longer about biblical sexual ethics. This next section is about believers eating food offered to idols.

THE CORINTHIAN LETTER IS WRITTEN IN FIVE LONG ESSAYS THAT OUR MODERN CHAPTER DIVISIONS BREAKS UP.

.....

THE ESSAYS ARE:

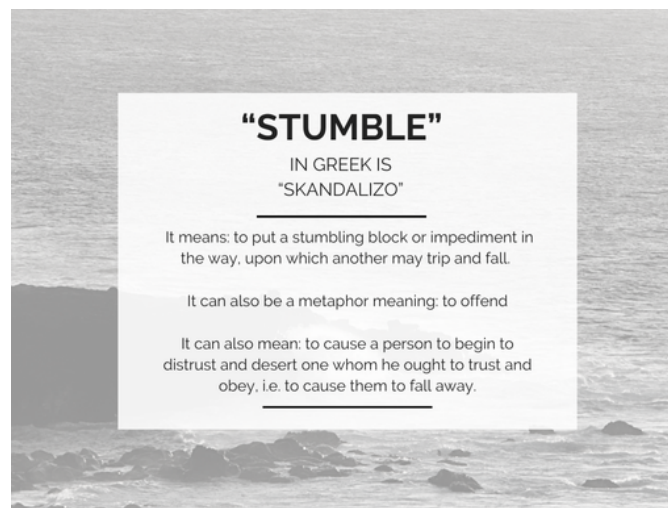
- CH 1-4 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS CAUSED BY FOLLOWING MAN, NOT FOLLOWING CHRIST
- CH 5-7 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS RE: SEX
- CH 8-10 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS RE: FOOD
- CH 11-14 DIVISIONS & PROBLEM RE: THEIR WEEKLY GATHERINGS
- CH 15 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS RE: UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE RESURRECTION TO THEIR LIVES AND GATHERINGS

Today we are going to read the entire chapter, look at the last verse first, contrast that to the first verse, while humbly praying that God's Spirit makes application in our personal lives.

Paul says in the end of **verse 13** "...for I don't want to cause another brother to stumble".

For most of us, that word "stumble" prompts vivid word pictures in our mind of when at the most inopportune time, we unexpectedly "stumbled".

This word "stumble" in the Greek is the word "skandalizo" and it means: to put a stumbling block or impediment in the way, upon which another may trip and fall. It can also be a metaphor meaning: to offend. In addition it can mean: to cause a person to begin to distrust and desert One whom he ought to trust and obey, i.e. to cause them to fall away.



Now in Paul's letter to the Corinthians where this word "stumble/scandalizo" appears, he is writing to God's church in Corinth. And the "church" is the gathering of individuals that confess that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. So these are real people, people that trust in Jesus, living "in community" in ancient Corinth, helping each other live out the Christian life - real, meaningful relationships, as brothers and sisters in Christ. So look at the definition of "stumble" in the context of relationships among the body of believers. To cause someone to "stumble" then means that one would put something in a fellow believers path that would cause them to "stumble" and potentially cause them to begin to distrust and desert the one whom they ought to trust and obey,(Jesus), and maybe even cause them to fall away.

If you go back to simply what it looks like physically when someone stumbles, they misstep, loose their footing, trip, they fall, sometime they stumble dramatically, sometimes dropping what is in their hands, or careening off the path, or maybe breaking things they fall into, sometimes getting hurt, or taking people out as they stumble, maybe delaying their arrival to where they were headed, or never arriving at all. All of those descriptions of stumbling can describe someone spiritually stumbling as well.

Is causing a fellow believer to stumble what God intended for relationships? For his Church?

In that light, look how strong Jesus' words are regarding causing someone to stumble in **Matthew 18:6 NIV**. Ouch. That's dramatic vivid imagery, and...harsh. But in light of the devastating consequences to another believer, or to God's church, of causing them to stumble, is it harsh? "Little ones" in **Matthew 18:6** is a reference to "those new in the faith... babes in Christ.." whose faith is so easily "shipwrecked". You will see that tied into our passage today.

Thus because of the devastating consequences and Jesus' strong warning, this is why Paul says in the end of **verse 13** "...for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble".

**Verse 13** gives us the goal of what we are to avoid, and that is “causing another believer to stumble”. The answer of how to achieve that goal of “not causing another believer to stumble” is in beginning of the chapter, the last line of **Verse 1b** “...It is love that strengthens the church”. Is there any surprise that the answer is “love”?



If love is the answer to how not to cause someone to stumble, then let's look at how practically Paul taught the Corinthians to love each other.

“Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols.” Paul is in Ephesus when writing this letter to the Corinthians, some time has passed since he had left Corinth, and he receives communication from Corinth, also probably a letter. In that letter are questions that Paul is referring to in **verse 1**, and the question posed are related to Christians in Corinth eating food that has been offered to idols.

For us in western cultures, 2000 years later, this doesn't seem like much of an issue at all. Our meat mostly comes from butcher houses that supply big box grocery stores. That wasn't the case in Corinth. Meat was available to the public because of idol worship. Specifically, animals were sacrificed to the many gods, lower case “g”, in Corinth. After the sacrifices were made, what wasn't eaten by temple priests and temple workers was then sold in the local market for profit. This was big business in the Corinthian market.

In the 2nd century there was a Greek writer and geographer named Paulsanius. Between 143 and 161 AD he wrote a 10 book set describing the geography and culture of many Greek cities and provinces called a “Description of Greece”. He was really interested in Greek gods, alters and temples. His works were so well respected that scholars say that “without Paulsanius, the ruins of Greece would for the most part be a labyrinth without a clue, a riddle without an answer.”



Now regarding Corinth, Pausanias described the central “market square” of Corinth as being surrounded by temples and statues to the Greek gods: Dionysus, Artemis, Baccheaus, Fortune, Poseidon, Apollo, Aphrodite, Hermes, Zeus, Zeus of the Underworld, Zeus Most High, and the Muses. So picture the central market in the center of Corinth, the same central market where the Corinthian court and bema seat were, that we just talked about in **Chapter 6 verse 1**, and surrounding this central market are all these large idols, and alters to the idols, and temples. And that is where the meat referenced was offered to the Corinthian gods. The sacrifices – meat – that wasn’t eaten by the priests and temple workers was sold in the markets for profit. The meat market was centrally located to these temples. Kenneth Bailey, says “During the numerous feasts there was an inevitable glut in the meat market, and the price would drop accordingly. For many of the poor this was probably the only time they could afford to eat meat.” Their meat didn’t come from Giant, it came from the central market in Corinth.

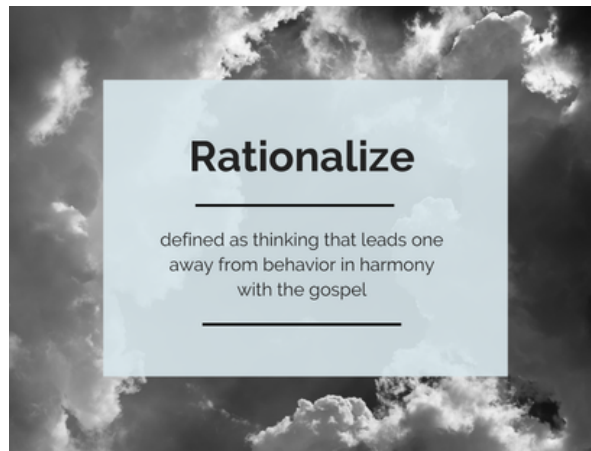


The feasts referenced were in part “guild feasts”. In Corinth, every trade or workers guild had their own patron god. Sometimes multiple times per month they, as a workers guild, would collectively have a feast, which would include the meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to their guilds specific god. These feasts were a huge part of everyday life – it was the norm to participate – thus inevitably everyone was eating meat offered to idols. “Community” was the hub of life, the social, civic, religious, and business agendas were intertwined, impossible to tease apart.. so how was a believer to live in Corinth without being part of community life that involved eating meat – likely offered to idols?

The Christians in Corinth, people with average jobs for their times, from all different workers guilds, are just trying to figure out how to walk out their faith in Christ in a pagan society, how to apply the gospel to their daily lives, which prior to Christ involved meat that was most likely offered to idols. And this issue has divided the believers, which of course any division is a concern to Paul as it is to us as well, as unity among believers is the evidence of God’s Spirit in the church. But it’s not just the divisions that concerns Paul, it’s their pride and lack of love for each other. The division over eating meat offered to idols is just a “symptom” of pride and lack of love for each other.

It appears from Paul’s response to the Corinthians in **verse 1** that they didn’t just ask the question regarding is it ok to eat meat offered to idols, they also seem to have presented their argument as to why they thought it was ok.

Look at **verse 1b** starting with “Yes”. So from how Paul responds to them **verse 1** and then **verses 4-7**, we can conclude that the Corinthian’s argument to be able to eat meat offered to idols is that they saw themselves as having superior spiritual knowledge and understanding that allows them too eat meat offered to idols. They believe, or I should say they “rationalize”, that because there is only one true God then these “idols” that the meat was offered to, are really not “gods” at all. And thus, if the idols are “not gods”, then meat offered to so called idols, is ok to eat. That’s their rationalization. Rationalization here is defined as thinking that leads one away from Christ like behavior.



As a fellow meat lover, I am sympathetic to their efforts. Here's what I know about myself. When I like or want something, I'm a pretty good "rationalizer". I have an uncanny ability to rationalize my behavior, and I know where that has taken me in the past on too many occasions - dark places. So I really am thankful that Paul here in **Chapter 8** has the inspiration of God to confront these rationalizations.

Now Paul has options here as to how he can respond to the Corinthian's prideful, loveless rationalizations.

Paul's first option is that he could cite the signed letter from the Jerusalem Council that already answered this question about Christians eating meat offered to idols. Just a few years prior to Paul writing 1 Corinthians, The Jerusalem Council was convened by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas were there, Peter was there.... and the purpose of the council was to determine if a gentile, who put their faith in Jesus for salvation, also needed to be circumcised according to Jewish laws? That was the main focus of the Council. But in addition to the apostles and elders resolving that question, (which was a resounding "NO" by the way) the elders and apostles also resolved that gentile believers should refrain from eating meat offered to idols. **Acts 15:29a** "...you must abstain from eating food offered to idols." Paul was at that council, he had their report to reference, this was like have a home run in your back pocket and you just needed to pull it out. If Paul had cited the Jerusalem council resolution, it would be sort of like citing case law in our current court system.. prior rulings, if applicable, apply to the present.

So if the Jerusalem Council already had a determination on eating meat offered to idols, why didn't Paul, now a few years later, just reference that to the Corinthians?

Another option that Paul didn't exercise is "shaming the Corinthians" and calling them "foolish" in their rationalizations. We already saw Paul use that approach with other issues back in **Chapter 6 verse 5**. "Shaming", as a persuasive tool, was common in Greek shame and honor cultures because it worked - That doesn't fly so well in our western thinking. Paul could have used the shame option, but he didn't exercise that option either.

Rather, Paul chooses a different response first. Paul first needed to deal with much bigger spiritual issues that their question and rationalization revealed. That is, it was their pride, and consequent lack of love toward each other, that was (**verse 13b**) "causing another brother to stumble". What is behind this present division in the Corinthian gathering? Pride and lack of love. That is what Paul needed to respond to first.

So this is how Paul responds. Paul says in **verse 1b NIV** regarding their pride, "knowledge puffs up, while love builds up". The NLT translation contextualizes the Greek words and it reads this way **verse 1b NLT** "while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church". So now we see the scope of the problem, in pride we can cause a brother to stumble, or we can in love, build up a brother, and strengthen the church. Pride vs. Love...



Sort of sounds like the stand off between Lucifer and Jesus doesn't it? Who won? Jesus! And what always wins in relationships is Love. What stands in the way of love is pride.

In the case of the Corinthians it was their "pride" in what spiritual knowledge they thought they had. "Knowledge" as is pointed out in **verse 2** is a "pride trap"... Knowledge can be used for God's Kingdom or knowledge can be used for your own kingdom.. be careful to build God's Kingdom.

**Verse 3 NIV** "but whoever loves God is known by God". In essence what Paul is saying is, "the spiritual knowledge you think you have isn't important, Rather the knowledge that is important is that when you love God, God knows you." This is one of those phrases that make you go "huh?" To be "known" is a deep longing within everyone. I am so thankful that I am "known" by my wife. I love my wife, she has my best interest at heart, she knows me best - and because she knows me best, I then trust her perspective, her insights, her wisdom. Similarly, what Paul is saying, is that believers who love God, the God who knows them best, can likewise trust his perspectives, his insights, his wisdom, his counsel. To be known by God thus means you have knowledge of the heart of God for you. And yes, God loves you because God is Love. How does one love God and receive this beautiful gift of "being known by God"? Spend a lot of time with God, spend time in his Word, allow him into the hurting places, abide with him, share with him, listen to him. He loves you.

In **verses 4-8** Paul confirms that what the Corinthians knew spiritually about Idols not being gods at all is true, because there is only one God. But what the progression of these verses reveals is that the Corinthians' application of this knowledge was not in alignment with loving others, because they used their knowledge for self-gain, for their own kingdoms.

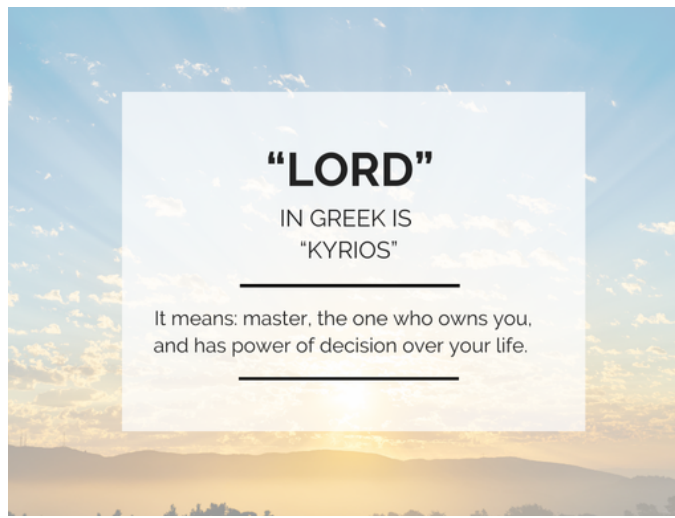
**Verse 4b** "That's true, there is only one God." Capitol "G". Note here in **verse 5**, Paul introduces the word "Lord" into his response. That's important... you will see it again. **Verse 6** Paul converts these truths into beautiful poetry.

"Father" as in a Father's love, who has their child's best interest at heart. Think of the beautiful expression of the word "Father" we see in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

"and for whom we live" not living for self or our own kingdom, but live for God the Father.

"And there is one Lord". The Greek word for "Lord" is "kyrios" and it means "master", the one who owns you and has power of decision over your life.

"and through whom we live"



Put that all together in context. So because there is One God, we live for him, not self. And because there is One Lord who owns us, “we live through him”. That because Jesus is our Lord, we don’t have life outside of him, we live “through him”. **Galatians 2:20**

Now Paul uses this poem to continue the foundation of his argument that “loving others is the best way to answer the question of whether they should eat meat offered to idols. If they are “living for God” and “living through the Lord Jesus Christ”, then they are going to do what is best for others, out of “love” - Why? Because God is love.

Well how does “love” answer the question? **Verse 7** implies that “love” will not violate someone’s weak conscience. In essence Paul is saying, a new believer may not have superior knowledge that idols are really not gods at all, they may still be leaning towards “polytheism”, meaning that there is a hierarchy of gods and Jesus just happens to be the highest.

The phrase “weak conscience” is not necessarily a negative, it may also mean they have the most “sensitive conscience”. If you are in a group of people and someone says something that is funny but crude.. and everyone laughs, you may be tempted to laugh even tho your sensitive conscience alerted you it was wrong. I have experienced it. What Paul is describing is like that.

Now to show the Corinthians how much they were “self-focused” verses “others-focused” look at **verse 8** and the frequency of the word “we”. They are totally self-focused... it’s true that you can’t push God away or draw him closer by what you do... but their use of that argument is all about the self.

Listen to the rest of the narrative in **verse 9**. So go back to the imagery of someone physically “stumbling”... Picture it in our head. At the onset of their stumble, what it is that trips them is a fellow believer’s “expression of spiritual freedom” .. A fellow believer doing some behavior that they are ok with for themselves, but another believer isn’t. The other believer is not ok with it because they have a more “sensitive conscience”. But out of peer pressure, the one who is not ok with it, does it anyway .. Hence they “stumble”. A dramatic stumble, taking people out stumble, breaking things when they fall stumble, delaying their arrival stumble, maybe not arriving at all stumble. And thus they “fall away”. This is a fellow believer that Jesus died for, as it says in **verse 11**. Was the moment of pride, of selfish - loveless freedom worth it?  
**Romans 14:20**

Paul then gives this thunderous admonishment in **verse 12**.

In **verse 13** Paul ends with his own “personal code of conduct” while in the fellowship of believers. His personal code of conduct models for us how love answers the question.

**Let me close with these thoughts for your meditation and prayer before the Lord.**

1. Is your personal code of conduct re: your freedoms in Christ based on love for others or based on self-gain, self-pleasure, self-indulgence, or self-importance.
2. Consider the very real ways you might cause a fellow believer to stumble. This could be spouse, child, friend, neighbor or coworker.

Then ask pray fervently for Wisdom from God to love first, thus removing the obstacles that cause others to stumble.