



## Silverdale Baptist

VICTORY IN CHAOS ~ CHRISTIAN LIBERTY ~ 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13 ~ 03/04-05/2023

### Main Idea

Christian liberty and the gray areas of life

### Getting Started

**Leader:** *The following questions are from Pastor Tony's outline.*

**Which of the following questions represent gray areas in your Christian life?**

**What do you eat?**

**What do you wear?**

**Where do you go?**

**What movies to watch?**

**How many children should you have?**

**What do you drink?**

**What music do you listen to?**

**What friends do you have?**

**How do you spend money?**

**How should you educate your children?**

When answering questions like these, Christians, like most people groups, tend to fall into two extremes.

- Legalism – *There are no gray areas. Everything is black or white.*
- Libertinism – *Everything's a gray area.*

***Which camp do you typically fall into?***

As Christians, living two thousand years from the most recently written portions of Scripture, it's reasonable to expect that many of the questions we face in our modern world are not explicitly addressed in the Word. For example, Paul did not own an iPad, and he was never asked how much screen time was appropriate for young children. So, how do we know what to do? We apply principles found in the Word to each situation. Above are some of the questions Pastor Tony asked. Most of us have opinions on these questions, but are you sure you are correct?

So, how do we learn to discern the right approach? First, let's look at 1 Corinthians 8.

## Learn

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13

**What is the main idea in this passage?**

**How does Paul sum up his answer to the question? (vs. 13)**

***Leader:** This information is provided to help **you** be ready to discuss the chapter. It doesn't necessarily need to be a part of the group discussion. Paul outlines the heart of the problem in verses 1-3. As you read the text, Paul's answer to verses 1-3 is outlined by the words **Therefore** in verse 4, **However** in verse 7, and again **Therefore** in verse 13. So in a broad sense, you could think of the chapter this way:*

*The question (verses 1-3)*

*The answer (verses 4-6)*

*The application (verses 7—12)*

*The summary statement (verse 13)*

*As usual, we have included Pastor Tony's outline in this guide.*

## How do we balance Christian liberty and gray areas of life?

### 1. Does this violate any New Testament Scripture?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER REREAD 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-10 AND REREAD 8:1

**Is it a gray area if an attitude or behavior is straightforwardly addressed in Scripture?**

As Pastor Tony pointed out, five of the ten commandments are included on this list. Where Scripture is clear, we are clear.

But what about those gray areas?

### 2. Does it violate my conscience?

What does Paul say about the conscience in verse 7?

### 3. Is it beneficial to me?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER REREAD 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23 AND REREAD 8:8.

**Compare these verses. What are they saying?**

**If something doesn't bring me closer to God, why would I do it?**

### 4. What does my weakness require?

**What does verse 9 say about stumbling blocks?**

**What are your weak areas, your danger zones?**

### 5. What does my friend need?

**According to verses 11-13, how should I respond to my friend's need?**

## Apply

**Are you checking your life choices by what the Word of God says?**

**Are you involved in activities that violate your conscience or the conscience of someone around you? If yes, how is that loving them?**

**In what ways do you love your brother by being sensitive to their conscience?**

**What are you doing that you now know needs to stop?**

**Once more, how are you loving your brother, and your sister, by the choices you are making?**

**What has God said to you in this study? How will you respond?**

## Pray

Father, thank you for our freedom in Christ! But, please give us wisdom. Through Your Holy Spirit, keep us from misusing our freedom.

## Dig Deeper

### **Knowledge Must Be Balanced by Love (1 Cor. 8:1–13)**

There were two sources of meat in the ancient world: the regular market (where the prices were higher) and the local temples (where meat from the sacrifices was always available). The strong members of the church realized that idols could not contaminate food, so they saved money by purchasing the cheaper

meat available from the temples. Furthermore, if unconverted friends invited them to a feast at which sacrificial meat was served, the strong Christians attended it whether at the temple or in the home.

All of this offended the weaker Christians. Many of them had been saved out of pagan idolatry and they could not understand why their fellow believers would want to have anything to do with meat sacrificed to idols. (In Rom. 14–15, the weak Christians had problems over diets and holy days, but it was the same basic issue.) There was a potential division in the church, so the leaders asked Paul for counsel.

Paul called to their attention three important factors.

**Knowledge (vv. 1–2).** The Corinthians were enriched in spiritual knowledge (1 Cor. 1:5) and were, in fact, rather proud of their achievements. They knew that an idol was nothing, merely the representation of a false god who existed only in the darkened minds of those who worshiped it. The presence of an idol in a temple was no solid proof that the god existed. (Later, Paul would point out that idolatry was basically the worship of demons.) So the conclusion was logical: A nonexistent god could not contaminate food offered on his altar.

So far, it is the strong Christians who are ahead. Why, then, are the weak Christians upset with them when their position is so logical? Because you don't always solve every problem with logic. The little child who is afraid of the dark will not be assured by arguments, especially if the adult (or older brother) adopts a superior attitude. Knowledge can be a weapon to fight with or a tool to build with, depending on how it is used. If it "puffs up" then it cannot "build up [edify]."

A know-it-all attitude is only an evidence of ignorance. The person who really knows truth is only too conscious of how much he does not know. Furthermore, it is one thing to know *doctrine* and quite something else to know *God*. It is possible to grow in Bible knowledge and yet not grow in grace or in one's personal relationship with God. The test is *love*, which is the second factor Paul discussed.

**Love (vv. 3–6).** Love and knowledge must go together; "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). It has well been said, "Truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy." Knowledge is power and it must be used in love. But love must always be controlled by knowledge (see Paul's prayer in Phil. 1:9–11). The strong believers in the church had knowledge, but they were not using their knowledge in love. Instead of building up the weak saints, the strong Christians were only puffing up themselves.

Paul's great concern was that the strong saints help the weaker saints to grow and to stop being weak saints. Some people have the false notion that the *strong* Christians are the ones who live by rules and regulations and who get offended when others exercise their freedom in Christ; but such is not the case. It is the *weak* Christians who must have the security of law and who are afraid to use their freedom in Christ. It is the weak Christians who are prone to judge and criticize stronger believers and to stumble over what they do. This, of course, makes it difficult for the strong saints to minister to their weaker brothers and sisters.

It is here that love enters the picture, for "love builds up" and puts others first. When spiritual knowledge is used in love, the stronger Christian can take the hand of the weaker Christian and help him to stand and walk so as to enjoy his freedom in Christ. *You cannot force-feed immature believers and transform them into giants.* Knowledge must be mixed with love; otherwise, the saints will end up with "big heads" instead of enlarged hearts. A famous preacher used to say, "Some Christians grow; others just swell."

Knowledge and love are two important factors, for knowledge must be balanced by love if we are to use our Christian freedom in the right way. But there is a third factor.

**Conscience (vv. 7–13).** The word *conscience* simply means "to know with," and it is used thirty-two times in the New Testament. Conscience is that internal court where our actions are judged and are either approved or condemned (Rom. 2:14–15). Conscience is not the law; it bears witness to God's

moral law. But the important thing is this: *conscience depends on knowledge*. The more spiritual knowledge we know *and act on*, the stronger the conscience will become.

Some Christians have weak consciences because they have been saved only a short time and have not had opportunity to grow. Like little babes in the home, they must be guarded carefully. Other saints have weak consciences because they *will* not grow. They ignore their Bibles and Christian fellowship and remain in a state of infancy (1 Cor. 3:1–4; Heb. 5:11–14). But some believers remain weak because they are afraid of freedom. They are like a child old enough to go to school, who is afraid to leave home and must be taken to school each day.

The conscience of a weak Christian is easily defiled (1 Cor. 8:7), wounded (1 Cor. 8:12), and offended (1 Cor. 8:13). For this reason, the stronger saints must defer to the weaker saints and do nothing that would harm them. It might not harm the mature saint to share a feast in an idolatrous temple, but it might harm his weaker brother. First Corinthians 8:10 warns that the immature believer might decide to imitate his stronger brother and thus be led into sin.

It is important to note that the stronger believer defers to the weaker believer in love *only that he might help him to mature*. He does not “pamper” him; he seeks to edify him, to help him grow. Otherwise, *both* will become weak.

We are free in Christ, but we must take care that our spiritual knowledge is tempered by love, and that we do not tempt the weaker Christian to run ahead of his conscience. Where knowledge is balanced by love, the strong Christian will have a ministry to the weak Christian, and the weak Christian will grow and become strong.

### **Experience Must Be Balanced by Caution (1 Cor. 10:1–22)**

Paul reminded the experienced believers who were strong in the faith that they had better not grow overconfident in their ability to overcome temptation. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Paul used the nation of Israel as his example to warn the mature believers that their experience must be balanced by caution. He gave three warnings.

**First, he warned that privileges were no guarantee of success (vv. 1–4).** Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the power of God, just as the Christian believer has been redeemed from sin. (In 1 Cor. 5:7–8, Paul had already related Passover to salvation.) Israel was identified with Moses in their Red Sea “baptism,” just as the Corinthians had been identified with Christ in their Christian baptism. Israel ate the manna from heaven and drank the water God provided, just as Christians nourish themselves on the spiritual sustenance God supplies (John 6:63, 68; 7:37–39). However, these spiritual privileges did not prevent the Jews from falling into sin.

There are dangers to maturity as well as to immaturity, and one of them is overconfidence. When we think we are strong, we discover that we are weak. The strong believer who eats in the temple may find himself struggling with an enemy who is too strong for him.

Paul did not suggest in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that an actual rock accompanied the Jews throughout their wilderness journey, though some Jewish rabbis taught this idea. It was a *spiritual* rock that supplied what they needed, and that Rock was Christ. Sometimes the water came from a rock (Ex. 17:1–7; Num. 20:7–11) and at other times from a well (Num. 21:16–18). God provided the water.

**Paul issued a second warning: good beginnings do not guarantee good endings (vv. 5–12).** The Jews experienced God’s miracles, and yet they failed when they were tested in the wilderness. Experience must always be balanced with caution, for we never come to the place in our Christian walk where we are free from temptation and potential failure. All of the Jews twenty years old and upward

who were rescued from Egypt, except for Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness during their years of wandering (Num. 14:26ff).

We can hear some of the “strong” Corinthians asking, “But what does that have to do with us?” Paul then pointed out that the Corinthian church was guilty of the same sins that the Jews committed. Because of their lust for evil things, the Corinthians were guilty of immorality (1 Cor. 6), idolatry (1 Cor. 8; 10), and murmuring against God (2 Cor. 12:20–21). Like the nation of Israel, they were tempting God and just “daring Him” to act.

Paul certainly knew his Old Testament, and his readers would recognize the events referred to. The “lusting” is found in Numbers 11:4ff, the idolatry in Exodus 32, and the fornication in Numbers 25. The Israelites often tempted God, but perhaps Numbers 21:4–6 was the reference Paul had in mind. For their complaining, see Numbers 14 and 16.

This kind of sin is serious and God must judge it. Not only did some of these rebels immediately die (see 1 Cor. 11:29–31), but those who remained were not permitted to enter the Promised Land. They were saved from Egypt but were not privileged to claim their rich inheritance. Paul was not suggesting that his readers might lose their salvation, but he was afraid that some of them would be “castaways” (1 Cor. 9:27), disapproved of God and unable to receive any reward.

I heard about a pastor who gave a series of sermons on “The Sins of the Saints.” One member of the church, apparently under conviction, disapproved of the series and told the pastor so. “After all,” she said, “sin in the life of a Christian is different from sin in the life of an unsaved person.”

“Yes, it is,” the pastor replied. “*It’s worse!*”

We must not think that because the Jews were under the Law that their sins were worse than ours and therefore dealt with more severely. Sin in the church today is far more serious, because we have Israel’s example to learn from, and we are living “at the end of the ages.” To sin against the Law is one thing; to sin against grace is quite something else.

***Paul’s third warning was that God can enable us to overcome temptation if we heed His Word (vv. 13–22).*** God permits us to be tempted because He knows how much we can take; and He always provides a way to escape if we will trust Him and take advantage of it. The believer who thinks he can stand, may fall; but the believer who flees will be able to stand.

Paul had already told his readers to “flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18); and now his warning is, “Flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). He explained the reason why: the idol itself is nothing, but it can be used by Satan to lead you into sin. Idolatry is demonic (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37). To sit at an idol’s table could mean fellowship (“communion, partakers”) with demons. Paul was again enforcing the important doctrine of separation from sin (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

He used the Lord’s Supper as an illustration. When the believer partakes of the cup and loaf at the Lord’s table, he is, in a spiritual way, having fellowship with the body and blood of Christ. By remembering Christ’s death, the believer enters into a communion with the risen Lord. In 1 Corinthians 10:18, Paul pointed to the temple altar and sacrifices as another illustration of this truth. The application is clear: A believer cannot partake of the Lord’s food (the Old Testament sacrifice, the New Testament supper) and the devil’s food (the idol’s table) without exposing himself to danger and provoking the Lord.

“Are we stronger than He?” (1 Cor. 10:22) is directed at the strong Christian who was sure he could enjoy his liberty in the pagan temple and not be harmed. “You may be stronger than your weaker brother,” Paul intimated, “but you are not stronger than God!” It is dangerous to play with sin and tempt God.

**Freedom Must Be Balanced by Responsibility (1 Cor. 10:23–33)**

At no time did Paul deny the freedom of the mature Christian to enjoy his privileges in Christ. “All things are lawful”—BUT not everything is profitable, and some things lead to slavery (1 Cor. 6:12). “All things are profitable”—BUT some activities can cause your weaker brother to stumble (1 Cor. 8:11–13). In other words, it is a mark of maturity when we balance our freedom with responsibility; otherwise, it ceases to be freedom and becomes anarchy, lawlessness.

To begin with, we have a responsibility to our fellow Christians in the church (1 Cor. 10:23–30). We are responsible to build others up in the faith and to seek their advantage. Philippians 2:1–4 gives the same admonition. While we do have freedom in Christ, we are not free to harm another believer.

Paul applied this truth to the impending question of meat offered to idols. He had already warned against a believer *publicly* participating in pagan feasts (1 Cor. 8:9–13), so now he dealt with *private* meals. In 1 Corinthians 10:25–26, he instructed the believers to ask no questions about the meat purchased at the market for use in their own homes. After all, everything comes from God (he quoted Ps. 24:1) and all food is permissible to the believer (see Mark 7:14–23; Acts 10:9–16, 28; 1 Tim. 4:3–5). The mature believer can enjoy in his own home even meat sacrificed to idols. Even if meat purchased at the regular market originally came from the temple (which was often the case), he would not be harmed.

But what about those times when the believer is the guest in the home of an unbeliever? Paul handled that problem in 1 Corinthians 10:27–30. If the Christian feels disposed to go (Paul did not make this decision a matter of great import), he should eat whatever is set before him and ask no questions (see Luke 10:8; 1 Tim. 6:17). However, there may be present at the meal one of the weaker brothers or sisters who wants to avoid meat offered to idols, and who has done some investigating. If this weaker saint informs the stronger Christian that the meat indeed has been offered to idols, then the stronger saint must not eat it. If he did, he would cause the weaker believer to stumble and possibly to sin.

Paul anticipated the objections. “Why should I not enjoy food for which I give thanks? Why should my liberty be curtailed because of another person’s weak conscience?” His reply introduced the second responsibility we have: *We are responsible to glorify God in all things* (1 Cor. 10:31). We cannot glorify God by causing another Christian to stumble. To be sure, our own conscience may be strong enough for us to participate in some activity and not be harmed. But we dare not use our freedom in Christ in any way that will injure a fellow Christian.

But there is a third responsibility that ties in with the first two: *We are responsible to seek to win the lost* (1 Cor. 10:32–33). We must not make it difficult either for Jews or Gentiles to trust the Lord, or for other members of the church to witness for the Lord. We must not live to seek our own benefit (“profit”), but also the benefit of others, that they might be saved.

When Paul wrote, “I please all men in all things” (1 Cor. 10:33), he was not suggesting that he was a compromiser or a man-pleaser (see Gal. 1:10). He was affirming the fact that his life and ministry were centered on helping others rather than on promoting himself and his own desires.

Before we leave this important section, we ought to note the fact that Paul probably appeared inconsistent to those who did not understand his principles of Christian living. At times, he would eat what the Gentiles were eating. At other times, he would eat only “kosher” food with the Jews. But instead of being inconsistent, he was actually living *consistently* by the principles he laid down in these chapters. A weather vane seems inconsistent, first pointing in one direction and then in another. But a weather vane is always consistent: it always points toward the direction where the wind is blowing. That is what makes it useful.

Are there some things that a mature Christian can do in the privacy of his own home that he would not do in public? Yes, provided they do not harm him personally and he does not tempt the Lord. I know a couple who, when their children were small, eliminated all games from their home that used either cards or dice. When their children were more mature, they were permitted to play those games.

As Christians, we *do* have freedom. This freedom was purchased for us by Jesus Christ, so it is very precious. Freedom comes from knowledge: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The more we understand about the atom, for example, the more freedom we have to use it wisely. However, knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise, it will tear down instead of build up.

The strong Christian not only has knowledge, but he also has experience. He can look back and see how the Lord has dealt with him through the years. But he must be careful, for experience must be balanced with caution. Take heed, lest you fall!

The strong Christian knows that he has this freedom, but he also knows that freedom involves responsibility. I have the freedom, for example, to take my car out of the garage and drive it on the highway; *but I must drive it responsibly*. I am not free to drive at any speed on my street; nor am I free to ignore the traffic signs along the way.

Out of these chapters come several “tests” we may apply to our own decisions and activities.

“All things are lawful,” BUT—

1. Will they lead to freedom or slavery? (1 Cor. 6:12)
2. Will they make me a stumbling block or a stepping-stone? (1 Cor. 8:13)
3. Will they build me up or tear me down? (1 Cor. 10:23)
4. Will they only please me, or will they glorify Christ? (1 Cor. 10:31)
5. Will they help to win the lost to Christ or turn them away? (1 Cor. 10:33)

The way we use our freedom and relate to others indicates whether we are mature in Christ. Strong and weak Christians need to work together in love to edify one another and glorify Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, [\*The Bible Exposition Commentary\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 594–598.