

## INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 8. 1 Corinthians 8. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to 1 Corinthians 8.

## INTRODUCTION

So, we open into chapter 8 and move into the third major section of this book.

- The first section was on divisions in the church,
- the second section was largely on sexual relationships,
- and the third section today begins with food sacrificed to idols.

Now,

- I know you've just been waiting for this one,
- because I can't even begin to tell you how many emails
- I get from y'all worried
- about whether the meat you are buying at King Soopers
- has been sacrificed to idols.

But seriously, **Paul really begins to address how we inside the church are to deal with our differences and disagreements.**

- I don't know if you know this or not,
- but in the first century,
- church people were pretty dang opinionated.
- Can you imagine if they had Facebook?
- Thank God we've grown out of that, right?
- Christians aren't opinionated at all anymore!

## TRANSITION

So, even though I doubt you are worried about meat sacrificed to idols, I'd bet there are plenty of things you disagree with other Christians on. And Paul gives us instruction on what we do when we don't agree.

So, let's get into it. 1 Corinthians 8:1

## 1 CORINTHIANS 8a

[1] Now concerning food offered to idols

### EXPLAIN: DEMON MEAT

Now, we don't deal with this issue, but let me dig into it historically.

- The city of Corinth was a pagan society
- in the Roman Empire
- and it was filled with temples to the
- false gods of the Greco-Roman world.

Now, meat was used for worship purposes.

So, let's just say you are a worshipper of some Roman god, and you sacrifice a bull...well, that's a ton of meat!

- A few years ago we went in with some friends on a side of beef,
- and we purchased 1/8<sup>th</sup> of a cow,
- and that alone filled our freezer.
- It's a lot of beef!

And in Paul's day, animals are like currency. They are very expensive!

- The good news was that only about 1/3 of the meat was burnt in the sacrifice.
- The next third would be used for what's called a temple feast,
  - where you'd invite all your friends and crew,
  - and you'd throw a party,
    - "Party at Poseidon's temple,
    - BYOB,
    - but meat is provided!"

And then the last third of meat from the sacrifice to the idol would be sold in the market.<sup>i</sup>

And so, a big deal issue for the believers in Paul's day,

- especially those coming from Jewish backgrounds,
- was eating meat sacrificed to idols,
- because in their worldview you were ingesting and inviting that god into your being.
- You are connecting with the god or goddess.

So, back to our text.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3

[1] Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. [2] If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

So, he’s saying:

- *“Y’all have knowledge about food offered to idols.*
- *You have an opinion.*
- *But you need to be careful, ok!*
- *Because it can puff you up,*
- *rather than lovingly build others up.”*

You ever know someone who might have known the right things, but was just a jerk?

Yeah, that’s what Paul is talking about. He goes on in verse 4.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 8:4-6

[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.

## EXPLAIN: DEBATE

So, the debate in the church was, *“Can we eat meat sacrificed to idols or not? Is it demon meat or not?”*

- And some Christians decided to avoid this altogether
- by abstaining from eating meat,
- and they became vegetarians.
- And they’d point to the book of Daniel
- where he wouldn’t eat any of the meat
- in Nebuchadnezzar’s court,
- but only ate veggies,
- and they’d use that as a case for how they’d decided to live.

While others would say, *“Hey, these idols aren’t even real! There’s only one God, so it’s just meat.”*

- And they’d point to Acts 10,
- where Jesus told Peter that all food was clean.
- Meat is meat is meat.
- And if God didn’t want us to eat meat,
- then why did he make cows out of steak?
- Answer me that, vegans!

## TRANSITION

So, while we aren’t probably engaged in this same debate on food sacrificed to idols, the principles that Paul is about to give us are, I think, applicable for us when we have differences and disagreements in the church on stuff.

So, let's keep going. Verses 7-8

## 1 CORINTHIANS 8:7-8

[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.

### EXPLAIN

Ok, so Paul doesn't follow our culture and just say,

- *"Hey, everyone's right!*
- *To each his own.*
- *You do you,*
- *and as long as you doing you*
- *doesn't infringe on me doing me,*
- *we're cool."*

No, Paul makes it clear that he has a position on this whole meat-eating thing.

- His position is that those who think
- that eating meat offered to idols is wrong
- ARE WEAK.
- That's what he said.
- They are weak.
- Food is neutral.
- **We're no worse off or better off.**

## QUESTION #1

So, Paul isn't wishy washy, but rather, he gives us criteria we should consider when discerning whether something is or is not permissible for the Christian to partake in.

Essentially there are three questions to ask. And the first one is this:

### **SLIDE IS IT BIBLICAL?**

- We gotta ask if the thing is biblical or not.
- And Paul believes that there is no biblical reason
- for us to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols.
- Praise God! And enjoy the bacon. OK?

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## **EXPLAIN: ESSENTIALS & NON-ESSENTIALS**

But, in the question, "is it Biblical?" we need to talk about things that are essential, and things that are non-essential.

There's a quote, commonly attributed to Saint Augustine, which is very unlikely to actually come from him, but it's a good quote nonetheless.

*"In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."*

- And what that means is that as believers
- we are to seek unity...not uniformity.

Theologian Michael Bird actually gives us some helpful break downs of these essentials and non-essentials. Ok? Three levels of importance.

First, there are **matters essential for salvation**. Ok? These are the things that we're learning in our Fathom Academy class on Christian Theology.

- Things like the doctrine of the Trinity,
- Christology,
- the way of salvation,
- the Gospel message.

These are matters that are essential!

Second, there are **matters that are important** to the faith and the church, though not essential for salvation. So, these are second tier issues that we can agree to disagree over BUT still remain important to us.

- I would put things like our understanding of baptism,
- the Lord's Supper,
- gender roles,
- spiritual gifts.
- Things like that.
- They're important, but not essential for salvation.

And then third, there are **matters of indifference**. These are non-essentials. These are debatable things, preferences, and opinions.<sup>ii</sup>



## APPLICATION

So, we always ask, IS IT BIBLICAL?

- We are people of the book.
- We read the Bible
- and study the Bible
- and preach the Bible
- and strive to live by the Bible,
- and if it's in there,
- even if we don't like it,
- we submit to it.

So, there are things that are always wrong in the Bible.

- Murder,
- stealing,
- lying,
- sex outside of marriage,
- pornography,
- drunkenness,
- ok? I could go on and on.

So, that's where we start...IS IT BIBLICAL?

## QUESTION #2

The second question we should ask when determining if something is permissible for a Christian is this: **SLIDE IS IT WISE?**

If the first question:

- IS IT BIBLICAL?
- is really, *CAN I do this thing?*

The second question:

- IS IT WISE?
- is, *SHOULD I do this thing?*

And this brings us back to verse 8 in our passage, where it mentions our consciences.

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Now a conscience is something we don't really talk that much about anymore, but your conscience is a gift from God.

- It is a type of moral intuition
- where you know something is right or wrong
- before you can articulate it.
- It's like a sixth sense.
- It just feels right or wrong.
- That's your conscience.

And when the Bible doesn't clearly speak about a subject, we ask,

- IS IT WISE?
- What is our conscience saying to us?

Now, this is what is happening in our passage.

- Some people were, in their conscience,
- having problems with food offered to idols.
- Some weren't.

## ILLUSTRATION: EXAMPLES

So, when asking, is it wise, we begin to move into a realm where some things are wrong for some people, and not wrong for others. So, let's talk about some examples. And I'll try to equally offend everyone, ok?

### ALCOHOL

Is it appropriate for Christians to drink alcohol?

Well, when I first got saved in high school, I heard something like this:

- *“technically we're free in Christ to drink alcohol,*
- *but that doesn't mean that it's wise,*
- *because many people develop a problem with alcohol,*
- *so, the wise thing is to abstain completely.”*

But then the other side chimes in,

- *“yeah, but Jesus drank wine,*
- *so, it can't be inherently wrong.*
- *And just because something can be abused*
- *doesn't mean we avoid it completely.*
- *The wiser approach is to live out a healthy,*
- *God-glorifying relationship with alcohol.”*

So, which is it? Well, where is your conscience?

- You see, for some of you
  - who struggle with alcohol in moderation,
  - it is wrong to drink...ever!
- Others, you will be bound by your conscience to abstain.
- While others will imbibe responsibly.

## EDUCATION

How about this one? Joby Martin, an Acts 29 pastor in Florida brought this one up, and I just had to laugh, but it's true...

- you wanna see some Christian moms get crazy?
- Just ask them what the best way to educate their kids is...
- get you some homeschool mommas
- and some public school mommas together
- and let them go at it.

An the homeschool momma will say,

- *“Well, we homeschool our twelve kids.*
- *And you can send your child to that*
- *God-forsaken public school,*
- *where they outlaw God.*
- *And you can have them raised to believe*
  - *that they crawled out of some primordial ooze,*
  - *and their grandfather was an ape,*
  - *and they’ll get hooked on drugs and porn.*
- *That fine.*
- *But we love our kids.*
- *And frankly, we want to raise our kids in the Lord,*
- *and that is best done at home.”*

But then the public school momma will reply,

- *“Oh, that’s all good and fine,*
- *but there are some things we want for our kid.*
- *Like, we want him to grow up*
  - *with something called ‘social skills’.*
- *And it’s cool that your kids can all make their own clothes*
- *and you started a family bluegrass band,*
- *but we want our kid to learn a little something called math.*
- *And not only that, but the Bible says*
- *that we are to take the gospel into all the world,*
- *and what happens to the Christian witness*
- *if all the Christians leave the public schools.”*

And then a third momma will come up and say they send their kids to private school, and the first two moms will say, “how dare you!”<sup>iii</sup>

And all my homeschool jokes fell flat because of Corona Virus...

But, you see,

- it’s a matter of conscience.
- It’s a matter of wisdom.
- It’s not black and white in the Bible,
- and so, it’s something to decide for yourself.

Everyone mad at me yet? I hope you know I was joking...kinda.

## POLITICS

Well, if you aren't mad yet, get ready. Let's talk politics.

Some believers say,

- *“A man like President Trump,*
- *with such severe ethical and moral compromises*
- *should never get a Christian's support.*
- *I don't care what good you think he's done,*
- *he's encouraged such bigotry and division in our county,*
- *and to vote for him as a Christian*
- *is a violation of our witness,*
- *and outweighs any supposed political benefit.”*

Others say,

- *“Well, I'm not a fan of all he says and does,*
- *but I like him better than the alternatives.*
- *I'd never vote for the alternative*
- *who supports abortion on demand,*
- *promotes restrictions on religious freedoms,*
- *and is aggressive on countering Christian ideas on morality.*
- *So, even though he is flawed,*
- *he's the better choice.*
- *And didn't God use pagan kings*
- *in the Old Testament to help his people?*
- *God can use Trump, as well.”*

## TRANSITION

These are matters of conscience. And to ask, IS IT WISE? is the second step.

- But where we get in trouble
- is when we elevate an issue of wisdom
- to an issue of biblical importance.

Legalism is taking something that is a matter of conscience and elevating it to a commandment for all people.

We ask first, IS IT BIBLICAL? Then, IS IT WISE? And the third question to ask is found in the next verses in our passage.

Look at verses 9-12:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 8:9-12

[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.

### QUESTION #3

Ok, the third question to ask is this, **SLIDE IS IT LOVING?**

You see,

- one of the biggest problems with Christian freedom,
- is that we often slip into the sin of pride
- and we value our rights or freedoms
- over loving our brothers and sisters.

You say, *“I am free in Christ to do this.”*

- *“Yes, you are.*
- *But what about your friend.*
- *Is it loving to them for you to do this right here and right now?”*

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### APPLICATION

Listen, it's not loving to drink alcohol or talk about drinking in front of a friend who is a recovering alcoholic. It's sin!

That's what Paul just said: **sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.** It's sin!

You wanna know if you're loving towards others on some secondary issues? Go check out what you post on Facebook.

Are you promoting unity? Are you showing love? A bunch of you are dividing from other Christians because you disagree over a bunch of non-essential things, and you might need to repent and take down some of those posts.



- Yes, the Bible may give you freedom,
- your conscience may give you freedom,
- your strength may give you freedom.

But loving your friend should cause you to lay aside your freedoms for their sake. **This is called showing deferential love.**

## **MASKS**

IS IT LOVING? Listen, this is why we're wearing masks right now. I know that everyone has an opinion on these things. Right? I've heard it all week.

- *"Well, I read an article saying masks don't do anything."*
- *"Well, I read an article that said the opposite."*

Listen, everyone has read an article...ok?

- I'm glad your college roommate has a blog.
- And I'm sure they're well researched and authoritative.

But hear me, I don't care what you think about masks.

- I'd rather not wear one.
- But I'm going to lay down my rights,
- FOR MY BROTHER OR SISTER.

Do masks do anything?

- Listen, it doesn't matter!
- It's an issue of love.

## **CONCLUSION**

So, let's end this passage in verse 13

## 1 CORINTHIANS 8:13

[13] Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Don't you see how loving Paul is? **I'll never eat meat again!** Anyone else willing to permanently change their diet for a friend?

Paul is NOT saying that you shouldn't have preference and opinions here. Not at all. You should have strong opinions and have strong convictions.

These things matter:

- Alcohol.
- Education.
- Politics.
- Even masks.
- They matter!
- And you should have opinions.

But after saying his convictions, Paul still embraces those who disagree as brothers and sisters and he doesn't look down on them.

- Can you accept in close fellowship people who don't see the public school/home school question like you?
- Can you accept into close fellowship (like the same discipleship group), those who answer the "who should we vote for" question differently?
- Or does the moment that thing comes up in your D-group you find it difficult to accept one-another?

This is, frankly, why I rarely tell you about many of my opinions from up here...

- It's not that I don't have them
- Or that I'm scared,
- it's that I want this church about the gospel
- and not about uniformity over
- non-essential and debatable matters.<sup>iv</sup>

You should be willing to take every one of those opinions and convictions and lay it down at the altar of Christ, and pursue unity with your brothers and sisters.

This is how Jesus says people will know we are his followers,

- by our love for one another...
- not by us looking like one another...
- not even by us agreeing with one another...
- but by our love for one another.

Fathom, let us be a church where our love for Christ AND for each other is stronger than our disagreements on non-essential issues.

Let's pray together.

## RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – [fathomchurch.org/give](http://fathomchurch.org/give)
- PRAYER - [fathomchurch.org/prayer](http://fathomchurch.org/prayer)
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

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<sup>i</sup> David Garland, *1 Corinthians*.

<sup>ii</sup> Michael Bird, *Romans*.

<sup>iii</sup> Joby Martin, “*Gospel Unity*”

<sup>iv</sup> JD Greear, “*Unity > Uniformity*.”