SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

1 Corinthians 8

Knowledge Puffs Up, Love Builds Up — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-15 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Being right is not enough. What I know about my freedom has to answer to love for the brother beside me, because Christ died for him — and if my freedom trips him, I'll gladly give it up.

00 The Text

1 CORINTHIANS 8 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions · Command / instruction · Key repeated word · Sin / warning · Promise / blessing · Time / place / contrast

1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;

3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol 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 are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.

7 However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.

9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

Marked in the text

- **v1** "Knowledge makes arrogant" — Sin / warning
- **v1** "love edifies" — Command / instruction
- **v2** "he has not yet known as he ought to know" — Sin / warning
- **v3** "if anyone loves God" — Command / instruction
- **v3** "he is known by Him" — Promise / blessing

- **v4** “there is no such thing as an idol in the world” — Time / place / contrast
- **v4** “there is no God but one” — God — His character & actions
- **v5** “so-called gods” — Time / place / contrast
- **v6** “one God, the Father” — God — His character & actions
- **v6** “from whom are all things” — God — His character & actions
- **v6** “one Lord, Jesus Christ” — God — His character & actions
- **v6** “by whom are all things” — God — His character & actions
- **v7** “not all men have this knowledge” — Time / place / contrast
- **v7** “being accustomed to the idol until now” — Time / place / contrast
- **v7** “is defiled” — Sin / warning
- **v8** “food will not commend us to God” — Time / place / contrast
- **v9** “take care” — Command / instruction
- **v9** “a stumbling block to the weak” — Sin / warning
- **v10** “dining in an idol’s temple” — Time / place / contrast
- **v10** “be strengthened” — Sin / warning
- **v11** “is ruined” — Sin / warning
- **v11** “the brother for whose sake Christ died” — God — His character & actions
- **v12** “you sin against Christ” — Sin / warning
- **v13** “I will never eat meat again” — Command / instruction
- **v1** “knowledge” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v7** “conscience” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v7** “weak” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v11** “brother” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v12** “brethren” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

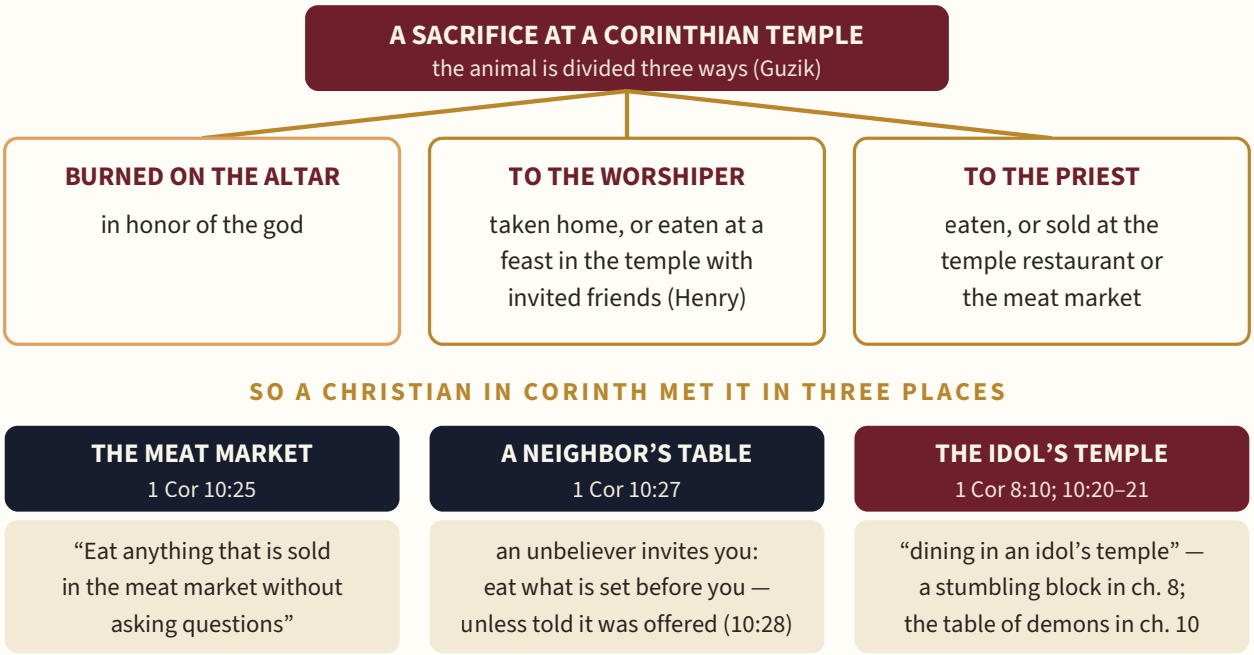
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 8:9

"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."

FIGURE · WHERE THE SACRIFICED MEAT WENT



Chapter 8 answers with love for the weaker brother; chapter 10 finishes the case.

Follow the meat from the altar to the street: the Corinthians' question met them at the market, at a neighbor's table and in the temple itself.

Setting. "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols" (v1) opens the next question from the Corinthians' letter (compare 7:1, 25), and Paul's answer runs through chapters 8, 9 and 10. Corinth was full of temples. A sacrificed animal was split between the altar, the worshiper and the priest, and the priest's share was eaten in the temple dining rooms or sold in the meat market. A Corinthian Christian met the question at the butcher's, at a neighbor's table, and at the temple restaurant where business and family events were held.

Who: "we" who "all have knowledge" (v1) — the "strong," who know an idol is nothing; "some" who are "accustomed to the idol until now" (v7) — the "weak," whose conscience is troubled; God the Father; the Lord Jesus Christ; the brother "for whose sake Christ died" (v11); Paul, speaking in the first person in v13.

Structure:

- vv1–3 — **knowledge and love:** "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (v1). The one who supposes he knows has not yet known as he ought; "if anyone loves God, he is known by Him" (v3).
- vv4–6 — **one God, one Lord:** "there is no such thing as an idol in the world," and "there is no God but one" (v4). Many so-called gods and lords (v5) — "yet for us there is but one God, the Father … and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (v6).
- vv7–8 — **not everyone knows:** old habits of idol worship make some eat with a weak conscience, which is defiled (v7). "Food will not commend us to God" (v8).
- vv9–13 — **the brother:** take care that "this liberty of yours" does not become a stumbling block (v9). Seeing you dining in an idol's temple, the weak man is "strengthened" to eat (v10); he is ruined, "the brother for whose sake Christ died" (v11); to wound his conscience is to "sin against Christ" (v12). Paul's resolve: "I will never eat meat again" (v13).

Repeated words, with counts (NASB95):

- "know / knows / known" ×6 — vv1, 2 (×3: knows, known, know), 3, 4; plus "knowledge" ×5 — vv1 (×2), 7, 10, 11. Eleven "know" words in thirteen verses — the Corinthians' favorite subject.
- "idol(s) / idol's" ×7 — vv1, 4 (×2), 7 (×2), 10 (×2).
- "sacrificed" ×4 — vv1, 4, 7, 10 (each time "things sacrificed to idols" or "sacrificed to an idol").
- "weak" ×5 — vv7, 9, 10, 11, 12.
- "eat" ×5 — vv7, 8 (×2), 10, 13; "food" ×3 — vv7, 8, 13; "meat" ×1 — v13; "eating" v4, "dining" v10.
- "brother / brethren" ×4 — vv11, 12, 13 (×2).
- "God" ×4 — vv3, 4, 6, 8; "gods" ×2 — v5; "lords" v5 ⟷ "one Lord" v6.
- "conscience" ×3 — vv7, 10, 12.
- "Christ" ×3 — vv6, 11, 12.
- "one" ×3 — vv4, 6 (×2); "all things" ×2 — v6.
- "stumble / stumbling block" ×3 — vv9, 13 (×2).

Contrasts: knowledge makes arrogant ⟷ love edifies (v1); knowing ⟷ being known (vv2–3); many gods and many lords ⟷ one God and one Lord (vv5–6); those with knowledge ⟷ those without it (v7); eating ⟷ not eating — neither better nor worse (v8); my liberty ⟷ my brother's ruin (vv9–11); sinning against the brethren ⟷ sinning against Christ (v12).

A wordplay to notice: the "strengthened" of v10 (KJV "emboldened") is the same Greek verb as "edifies" in v1. Love builds a brother *up*; careless knowledge "builds" him up — toward sin.

The chain in vv10–12: a brother sees → his weak conscience is "strengthened" → he eats against conscience → he is ruined → the one who caused it sins against the brethren → and against Christ.

Shape of the chapter: head (vv1–6) to heart (vv7–13), hinged on two "therefores" (vv4, 13). Paul affirms what the strong know, then turns their eyes from their knowledge to their brother, and ends with himself: "I will never eat meat again."

Chapter theme (my words): Being right is not enough. What I know about my freedom has to answer to love for the brother beside me, because Christ died for him — and if my freedom trips him, I'll gladly give it up.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 8:6

"yet for us there is but △one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and △one Lord, Jesus Christ, △by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

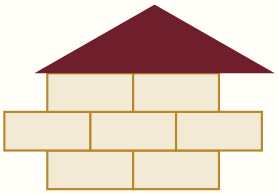
FIGURE · A BUBBLE AND A BUILDING

KNOWLEDGE PUFFS UP
physioō · G5448 · to inflate



swells the one who has it (v1)
"supposes that he knows" (v2)
grows bigger, not stronger

LOVE BUILDS UP
oikodomeō · G3618 · to build a house



a building
builds up the brother (v1)
"loves God … known by Him" (v3)
grows stronger, not just bigger

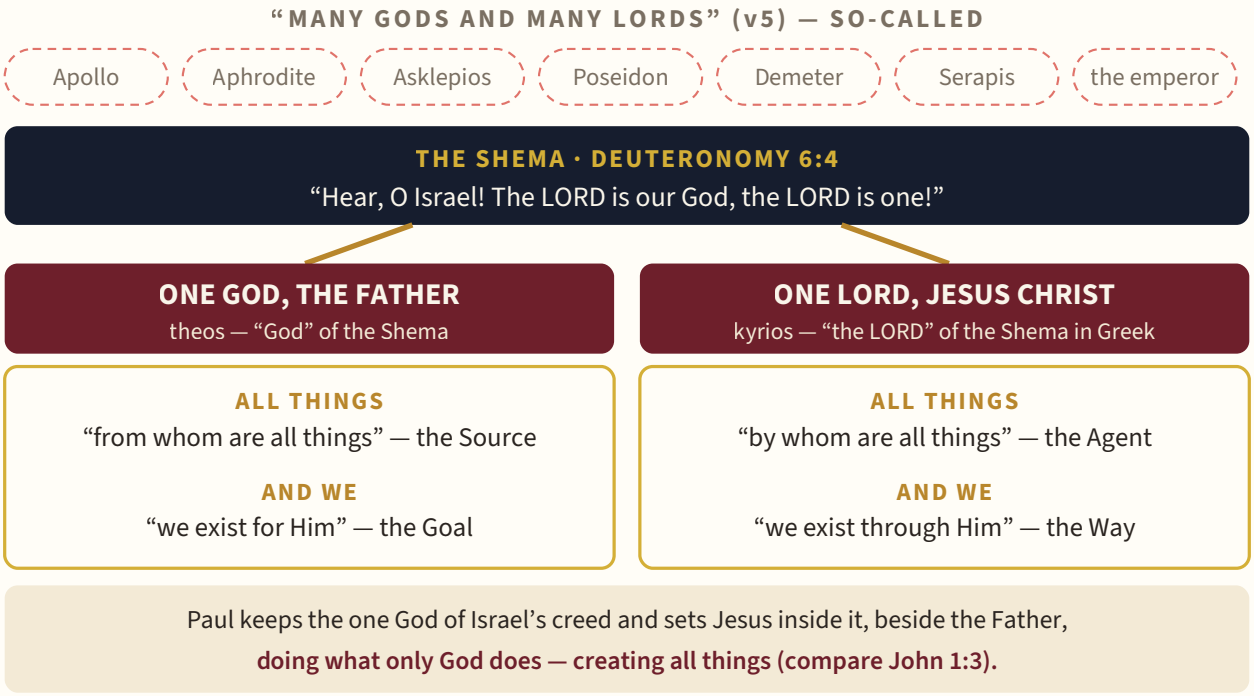
THE IRONY OF VERSE 10 — THE SAME VERB

The weak brother's conscience will be "strengthened" (KJV "emboldened") — *oikodomēthēsetai*, "built up" — to eat what ruins him.

Guzik: their misuse of liberty "was building others up towards sin."

Both knowledge and love make something grow — one inflates, one builds — and in verse 10 careless knowledge "builds" a brother straight into sin.

FIGURE · ONE GOD, ONE LORD



Against the crowded heavens of Corinth, Paul confesses Israel's one God and places the Lord Jesus Christ within that confession as the One through whom all things exist.

Context — the meat market and the temple restaurant. Guzik explains that sacrificed meat "was usually divided into three portions" — the god's, the worshiper's and the priest's — and the priest might sell his at "the temple restaurant or meat market." Henry adds that the heathen held their feasts in the temple and invited friends. The Corinthians' questions were practical: may a Christian buy it, eat it as a guest, or eat in the temple itself? Paul answers in three movements: the principle of love over knowledge (ch. 8), his own example of laying down rights (ch. 9), and the warning against idolatry with rules for market and table (ch. 10).

Knowledge and love (vv1–3). Paul probably echoes the Corinthians' own slogan — "we all have knowledge" — and agrees, then turns it: knowledge, by itself, inflates. Guzik: "it is the difference between a bubble and a building. Some Christians grow, others just swell!" Henry: "there is no evidence of ignorance more common than a conceit of knowledge." Sproul guards the other side: this verse is no excuse for shallow faith — a theology that puffs up shows "a very superficial understanding of the things of God," so "you need to do more work in theology." What matters most is that God knows me — and the mark of that is love for Him (v3; Gal 4:9). Spurgeon: when God sees "the first gleam of grace, He beholds it with joy."

One God, one Lord (vv4–6). Here the strong are right. There is no real god behind the statue, and there is only one God (Deut 6:4). Guzik: "If meat is offered to Zeus, there is no real Zeus." Scripture can call others "gods" in a lesser sense (the judges of Ps 82 and John 10:34; Satan as "the god of this age," 2 Cor 4:4) without granting them deity. Verse 6 is one of the high points of Paul's Christology: the Father is the source and goal of all things, the Lord Jesus Christ the agent through whom all things exist. Morris (in Guzik) explains that *kyrios* rendered the divine name in the Greek Old Testament; Sproul calls its highest use "the imperial usage." Paul has taken Israel's confession of the one God and set Jesus inside it. Henry is careful: the Father is named not to exclude the Son — "the Son is God too, but is not another God."

What is a "weak" conscience (v7)? Some converts had spent their whole lives treating the idol as real. When they eat the meat, it still feels like worship, and their conscience is "defiled." Guzik's clarification: a weak conscience is not one that doesn't work — "in fact, it overworks" — it is "wrongly informed." And "weak" refers to knowledge, not to spiritual maturity or self-control. Henry calls it "some confused veneration" for the idol: they "were not perfectly cured of the old leaven." Yet Paul never tells the weak man simply to override his conscience. Sproul: "it is wrong to consciously do what we consider to be a sin" — whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom 14:23).

A textual note on v7. NASB's "being accustomed to the idol" follows the oldest manuscripts (*synētheia*, custom); KJV's "with conscience of the idol" follows a later reading (*syneidēsei*). The sense is close: long habit had trained these consciences.

Food is not the measure (v8). Eating does not make us better, and abstaining does not make us worse. Guzik applies this to modern liberty questions — movies, drinking, music, television — and warns against treating any stance as proof of greater spirituality. Henry: "It matters little what we eat." Guzik reads the Jerusalem Council's food instruction (Acts 15:29) as "a temporary arrangement" for the gospel among the Jews of that day.

Was eating in the temple itself allowed? Chapter 8 argues on the strong man's own ground: even if you had the right, you would wound your brother. Henry says plainly that Paul "plainly condemns such liberty in ch. 10" — there the temple meal is "the table of demons" (10:20–21). So chapter 8 is not Paul's permission to dine in the idol's temple; it is his first argument against it.

Liberty that wounds (vv9–12). "This liberty of yours" — *exousia*, "right," the very word chapter 9 will turn on. A weak brother sees a knowledgeable believer reclining in the idol's temple, takes courage, eats against conscience, and is "ruined." The irony is sharp: the strong thought their knowledge would build the weak up — and it does "build" him, right into sin (Guzik: "building others up towards sin"). Then the stakes rise: he is the brother "for whose sake Christ died." To wound him is to "sin against Christ" (v12; compare Acts 9:4). Henry: "Injuries done to Christians are injuries to Christ."

The weak brother or the legalist? (v13) — the question where the teachers guard both edges. Paul's vow is not a tool for legalists. Guzik: Paul "would never allow this principle to be a way for a legalist to make demands and bind a Christian walking in liberty" — he withstood Peter in Galatians 2. Sproul's 2010 lecture said the same: defer to the weak, in private if need be, but when a weaker brother makes his scruple a law for the church, the gospel is at stake. The weak brother of chapter 8 is a man who could be drawn into sin, not a man who merely disapproves. Spurgeon puts the heart of it: "Let us treat men as we would treat our sons."

Pointing forward to chapter 9. Verse 13 is the hinge. Paul has just asked the strong to give up a right for a weaker brother's sake — and his next words are "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" (9:1). Chapter 9 shows him living what he asked: "we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ" (9:12).

Word study (Greek):

- **things sacrificed to idols — *eidōlothytos* (G1494):** idol-sacrificed meat; a Jewish word of scorn (vv1, 4, 7, 10).
- **knowledge — *gnōsis* (G1108):** knowing, understanding — the Corinthians' favorite word (vv1 ×2, 7, 10, 11).
- **makes arrogant — *physioō* (G5448):** to puff up, inflate like a bellows; six of its seven NT uses are in 1 Corinthians (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4).
- **love — *agapē* (G26):** self-giving love that seeks another's good (v1); the verb *agapaō* (G25) in v3.

- **edifies — *oikodomeō* (G3618):** to build a house; to build up (v1). The same verb is "strengthened / emboldened" in v10.
- **know / known — *ginōskō* (G1097):** to know by experience and relationship; v3 "is known" is perfect passive — known and staying known.
- **idol — *eidōlon* (G1497):** an image, a phantom — a shape with nothing behind it (vv4, 7).
- **one — *heis* (G1520):** the "one" of the Shema (Deut 6:4) — three times in vv4–6.
- **Lord — *kyrios* (G2962):** master; in the Greek Old Testament, the divine name (vv5–6).
- **accustomed — *synētheia* (G4914):** custom, habit (v7, oldest manuscripts).
- **conscience — *syneidēsis* (G4893):** "knowing-with" — the inner witness (vv7, 10, 12; eight times in chs. 8–10).
- **weak — *asthenēs* (G772):** without strength, feeble (vv7, 9, 10); the verb *astheneō* (G770) in vv11–12.
- **defiled — *molynō* (G3435):** stained, soiled (v7; Rev 3:4).
- **commend — *paristēmi* (G3936):** to present, bring near (v8) — food does not bring us closer to God.
- **liberty / right — *exousia* (G1849):** authority, right (v9) — the key word of chapter 9.
- **stumbling block — *proskomma* (G4348):** something to trip over (v9).
- **dining — *katakeimai* (G2621):** to recline at table, the banquet posture (v10).
- **idol's temple — *eidōleion* (G1493):** an idol's shrine with its dining hall (v10; only here in the NT).
- **ruined / perish — *apollymi* (G622):** to destroy, be lost (v11) — the "perish" of John 3:16.
- **wounding — *typtō* (G5180):** to strike, beat (v12).
- **cause to stumble — *skandalizō* (G4624):** to spring the trap, entice into sin (v13 ×2).

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **Paul starts with love, not food** — "the goal of the Christian life is not knowledge, but love" (Guzik).
2. **A bubble and a building** — knowledge inflates, love builds; "Some Christians grow, others just swell!"
3. **Being known beats knowing** — "he is known by Him" (v3; Gal 4:9).
4. **The answer to puffed-up theology is better theology,** not less (Sproul).
5. **Jesus is placed inside the Shema** — one God, the Father; one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.
6. **A weak conscience overworks** — wrongly informed, but never to be overridden (Rom 14:23).
7. **Your plate is not your rank** — food will not commend us to God (v8).
8. **Careless knowledge "builds" a brother into sin** — the same verb in vv1 and 10.
9. **The weak brother has a price tag** — "for whose sake Christ died" (v11).
10. **Protect the weak; don't obey the legislator** (Guzik, Sproul; Gal 2).

Cross-references: Exod 21:6; Deut 6:4; Ps 82:6; 115:4–8; Matt 18:6; Mark 15:19; John 1:3; 3:16; 10:34–35; Acts 9:4; 15:28–29; 17:23; Rom 11:36; 14:1–15:3; 1 Cor 1:5; 4:6, 18; 9:1–23; 10:19–33; 13:2–4; 2 Cor 4:4; Gal 2:3–14; 4:9; 5:13; Phil 2:10–11; Col 1:16; 1 Tim 2:5; 4:4; Heb 1:2.

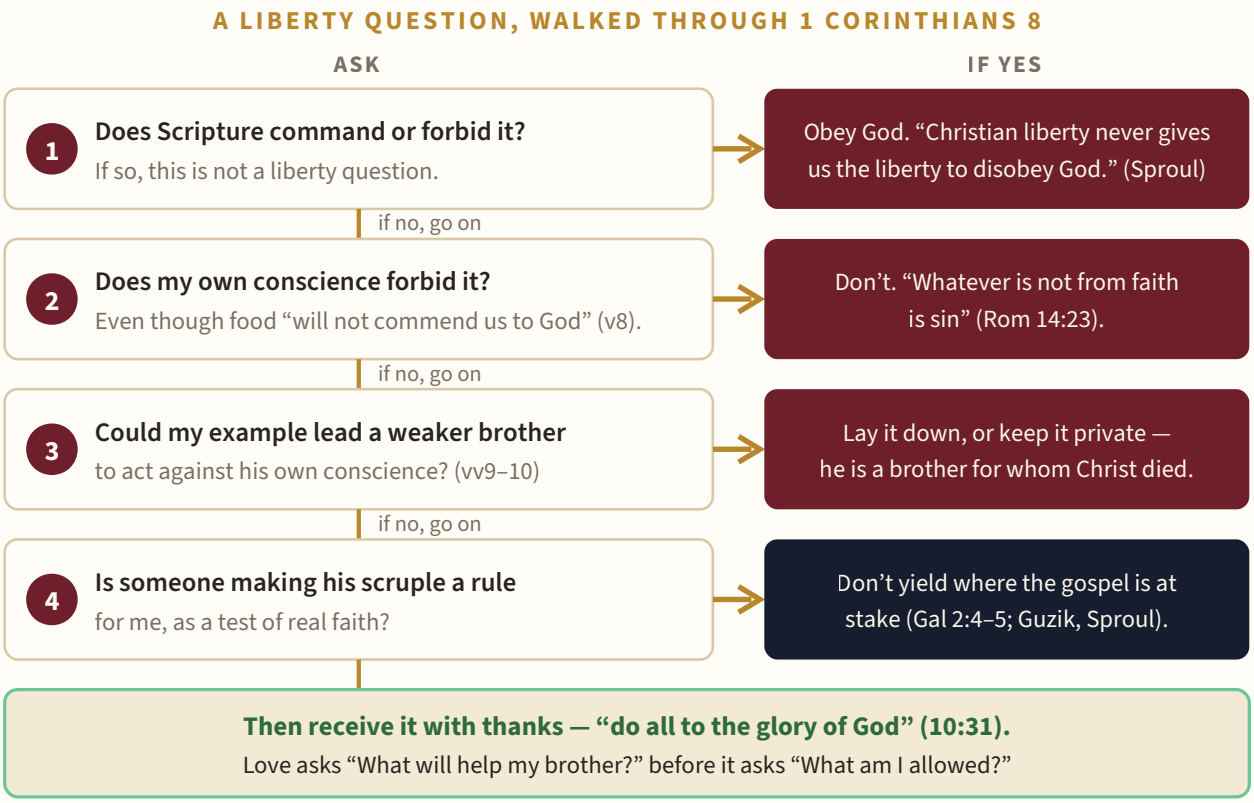
03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 8:13

"Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."

FIGURE · LIBERTY, CONSCIENCE AND LOVE



Read down the left side and stop at the first "yes": Scripture first, then my own conscience, then my brother's — and guard the gospel against anyone who turns a scruple into a law.

Warning to heed — knowledge without love just swells. "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (v1). I write Bible studies; I know a lot of facts about Scripture. That is exactly why this verse is for me. If what I know makes me impatient, superior or harsh with the brother who knows less, I have only swelled, not grown. Sproul is right that the cure isn't to study less — it's to know God better, because the more I really know Him, the more I love Him. The test is not what I know but whether I love — and whether I am "known by Him" (v3).

Promise to trust — one God, one Lord. Whatever "many gods and many lords" compete for a man — the bottle, the screen, money, a gang, a person — "for us there is but one God, the Father … and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (v6). Every idol a man has served is, in the end, nothing. The One who made him is the One who died for him. I exist *for* the Father and *through* the Son; that is where my life comes from and where it is going.

For the men I walk with — my freedom and my brother's sobriety. This chapter could have been written for recovery. A Christian may have liberty to drink a glass of wine; Scripture does not forbid it, and Spurgeon said the same. But if I order a drink at dinner across the table from a brother ninety days sober, I may be the man of v10 — the one whose example gives a weaker brother courage to do what will ruin him. The same goes for the movie I put on, the jokes I laugh at, the places I take a man fresh out of prison. "Take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak" (v9). My right is real; his soul is worth more. Spurgeon's picture stays with me: a father can stand at the cliff edge, but his boys will follow him there.

Sin to confess — wounding a brother is wounding Christ. "You sin against Christ" (v12). Lord, forgive me for the times I used my freedom without looking at who was watching, and for any brother I made it harder for.

Example to follow — Paul's line in the sand. "I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble" (v13). Paul did not make his freedom everyone's rule, and he did not let legalists boss him — but for a brother who could fall, he gave it up gladly. In practice: I can keep my house dry when a man in early recovery visits; I can choose the coffee shop over the bar; I can ask, "What would help you most?" rather than "What am I allowed?"

For the men in recovery — about your own conscience. If your conscience says "not for me," listen to it. A conscience can be weak, but overriding it is still sin (Rom 14:23), and for an addict "just this once" is often the first step back to the pit. And remember: Christ died for *you* (v11). Your sobriety matters to Him enough that He asks your stronger brothers to change how they live for your sake.

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. Where has what I know about the Bible made me impatient, superior or harsh with a brother who knows less? (8:1–2; 13:2) *A bubble or a building — does my knowledge swell me or build him?*
2. What would change in my week if I believed I am "known by Him" — not just that I know about Him? (8:3; Gal 4:9) *Being known by God, not my grip on Him, is the ground of my life.*
3. Which "so-called gods" still compete for the men at this table — the bottle, the screen, money, a person, a gang? (8:4–7; Ps 115:4) *An idol is nothing, but the pull of an old habit is real (v7).*
4. Is there a freedom I enjoy that could lead a brother in recovery to act against his conscience? What would love do? (8:9–11; Rom 14:15) *My right is real; his soul is worth more.*
5. How do I tell the difference between a weak brother I must protect and a legalist I must not obey? (8:13; Gal 2:4–5) *The weak can be drawn into sin; the legalist only disapproves.*
6. What is one specific thing I could lay down this month "so that I will not cause my brother to stumble"? (8:13; 9:12) *Paul made it personal: "I will never eat meat again."*

Worship. There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things — and that same Lord died for the weakest brother at my table. The God of the whole universe knows me by name. Every idol is nothing; He is everything.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, You are the one Lord, by whom are all things and through whom I live. Keep my knowledge humble and my love active. Show me where my freedom has become someone else's stumbling block, and make me glad to lay it down. Give me courage, too, not to bow to rules You never made. Guard every brother I serve who is fighting for his sobriety, and let me be a builder of his faith, never the reason he falls. Amen.

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