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Sometimes believers in the first century world faced problems that appear very strange to us in the modern world. Paul's words to the Christians at Corinth in the mid-first century in 1 Cor. 8:1-13 are some of those kinds of words.

This reminds us vividly of the "occasional" nature of the letters in the New Testament. These letters attributed to the apostle Paul were "occasioned" by very specific historical problems being faced in various congregations around the Mediterranean world in the middle of the first Christian century. We draw spiritual insight from Paul's conversation with his initial targeted readers only by finding timeless spiritual principles from his discussion that can then be applied to relatively similar situations that we face in our world. When the "distance" between the ancient and modern situations is great, then the applications to the modern setting must be made more tentatively and cautiously.



The details of the ancient situation addressed in our passage will be presented below, but in a nutshell it was simply this. In the ancient workaday world one did not and could not practice a trade without being a member of a trade guild or trade union. Each of these organizations had its patron deity or deities. In their meetings, most always around an evening meal of a banquet order, the meeting began with a dedication of all the food to the patron god or gods. Once a person became a Christian he faced a real dilemma. He had to continue membership in the union group if he were to make a living. But what to do about eating the banquet meal after it had been dedicated to the pagan idol of the union group? From Paul's discussion both in chapter eight and beyond in First Corinthians, there were two views on this matter. Paul calls one group the 'strong' group, and possibly it was comprised mostly if not exclusively of Jewish Christians. Their heritage in Jewish monotheism had conditioned them easily to reject the existence of the pagan gods completely. The other group, labeled 'weak,' by Paul was possibly comprised mainly of converted Gentiles who had grown up with a deep conviction of the real existence of many deities, and especially those that their family had worshiped. The so-called 'strong' group could participate in the trade union banquets with no qualms of conscience because of their 'knowledge' of the non-existence of these pagan deities. But the other 'weak' group of believers were facing real challenges. Their Christian commitment was to Christ as Lord alone. Would the meat offered to the patron deities somehow be changed by its dedication? And if so, would eating it as a Christian have devastating impact on one's standing before God? A considerable amount of fear of this was evidently present at Corinth among many of the believers.

So Paul attempts to walk through this mine field and provide some helpful advice to both groups in the church at Corinth. From his insights and advice, we may then learn some spiritual perspectives that can help us with somewhat similar delicate issues in our day.

I. Context

From [previous studies in 1 Corinthians](#), we will draw most of the background material regarding the origin of the document called First Corinthians.

Paul's letter to the Christian community at the ancient city of Corinth represents a significant part of his writing ministry. Some irony exists concerning this community, and Paul's correspondence and personal ministry to them. First Corinthians reveals a community riveted by factions, extreme moral problems and theological assertions that border on the bizarre. Yet, for many Christian groups today, Corinth represents the model church, primarily because of the practice of speaking in tongues. Paul's writing ministry was intended as a substitute for his personal presence. And it was intended to answer questions and address some of these problems that had arisen in the various house church groups over this Greek seaport city.

The ongoing history of Christianity in this Greek city reflects a tradition of problems that continued for a long, long time after Paul led in the establishment of Christianity there during the middle 50s of the first century. A fascinating letter to the church at Corinth came almost half a century after Paul's ministry from the spiritual leader in Rome. [First Clement](#) helps one see some of this problematic history decades after Paul. By AD 96, when 1 Clement was written, the tone of Christian experience had profoundly changed. Political language carried the day along with an intense demand for absolute obedience to those in authority. But through all this smoke screen from Clement of Rome, one can trace out a community of faith at Corinth still plagued with problems and struggles. In some ways that is helpful to us, in that it led to Paul putting in writing his thoughts on a number of important issues in the Christian experience.

a. Historical

External History. The historical setting of first Corinthians focuses upon the "reporter" questions about the composition of First Corinthians. Who wrote it? When was it written? Where was it written? To whom was it written? Why was it written? et al. In my reconstruction of [Paul's ministry to the Corinthians](#) at Cranfordville.com, this letter comes as the third point of contact with the Corinthians. The first was his initial preaching of the gospel there while on the second missionary journey in 50-51 AD. An initial letter was written to the Corinthians during AD 52, but is now lost, even though some feel that 2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1 may preserve a part of it. While at Ephesus during the third missionary journey First Corinthians was dictated by the apostle during the spring of either 54 or 55 AD.

The body of the letter is divided up as a response to questions from the household of Chloe (chaps 1-6) and the Corinthian delegation (chaps 7-16). In 1:11, Paul said, "[For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.](#)" Then in 7:1 we find: "[Now concerning the matters about which you wrote:...](#)" Thus the letter deals with two sets of issues, each posed by a different source.

Our passage, 8:1-13, comes toward the beginning of the second set of instructions. These arise out of questions posed by the Corinthians in a letter sent to Paul in Ephesus. The first issue dealt with begins

"It is well for a man not to touch a woman" in 7:1b.

The second issues begins "[Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy](#)" in 7:25. In 8:1 comes the next issue: "[Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.'](#)" In

9:1-2 is the next one introduced: "[Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.](#)" In 10:1-5 is the next issue introduced: "[I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.](#)" The next one is introduced with "[Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions](#)





just as I handed them on to you.” in 11:1-2. Probably the next one begins in 11:17: “**Now in the following instructions** I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.”

All of this underscores the reality that First Corinthians is an occasional letter, not a theological tractate. That is, the contents of the letter arose from a specific situation in Corinth and the letter attempts to address those individual situations present in the Christian community there. What that implies impacts interpretation of the relevancy of this content. When the same situation arises in a modern congregation, then the applicational distance between “then” and “now” is relatively short. But when such situations don’t exist in a modern church, then the interpretational distance between “then” and “now” is great and the application has to be much more tentative and less certain.

Paul most likely dictated the contents of the letter to a writing secretary and then added the final Conclusio in his own hand writing as a verification of the contents to the Corinthian readers, as is implied in 16:21 where he says, “**I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.**” Unfortunately, we do not know the identity of this person, as we do regarding Romans where Tertius identifies himself in 16:22 with the statement, “**I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.**”

The first readers of this letter were in the ancient seaport town of Corinth, as is described in the *Eerdmans’ Dictionary of the Bible*:

An important city controlling the isthmus connecting mainland Greece and the Peloponnesian Peninsula. Although its “golden age” was five centuries before Paul’s visit, Corinth had enjoyed a return to prominence



and a resurgence of building during the 1st century A.D.

Corinth had a leading role in the uniting of the Greek city-states into the world-wide empire of Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander. Two centuries later Corinth was a leader in the failed Achaean League’s attempt to stop Roman expansion in Greece. Severely damaged and punished in 146 B.C. in the war with Rome, Corinth was restored in 44 to economic and political prominence by Julius Caesar and in 27 became the provincial capital. New colonists from many areas joined locals seeking their fortune in this commercial center.

An important city for Roman government as the capital of Achaia, Corinth was the residence of the Roman governor (before whom Paul appeared in A.D. 51 when Lucius Junius Gallio was governor). In Roman Corinth, old temples were restored and enlarged, new shops and markets built, new water supplies developed, and many public buildings added (including three governmental buildings and an amphitheater seating perhaps 14 thousand). In the 1st century Corinth’s public marketplace (forum) was larger than any in Rome. All these improvements suggest that when Paul visited Corinth ca. 50 it was the most beautiful, modern, and industrious city of its size in Greece. The well-traveled Aristides commented that if beauty contests were held among cities, as reportedly was done among goddesses, Corinth would rank with Aphrodite (i.e., first).

This flourishing economic life also contained a mixture of religious corruption, generated largely by the fertility based worship of the goddess Aphrodite. S.J. Hafemann (“Corinthians, Letters to the,” *Dictionary of Paul and His letters*) summarizes:

As a wealthy hub for commerce and seafarers, Greek Corinth was evidently renowned for its vice, especially its sexual corruption, and for its many religious temples and rites. Aristophanes (c. 450–385 B.C.) even coined the term *korinthiazesthai* (“to act like a Corinthian,” i.e., “to commit fornication”) in view of the city’s reputation.

Plato used the term “Corinthian girl” as an euphemism for a prostitute (Murphy-O’Connor, 56). And although its historical accuracy is disputed, Strabo’s account of 1,000 prostitutes in the temple of Aphrodite does reflect the city’s image, in which the many temples played their own role in the immoral tenor of its life (cf. Strabo *Geog.* 8.6.20, first written in 7 B.C. and revised slightly in A.D. 18).

Thus into the mixture and immoral atmosphere came the gospel message, preached by Paul and others. The blossoming community of faith in the various house churches struggled to cope with both coming out of and at the same time trying to live within such an atmosphere as faithful Christians.

Internal History. The time and space markers inside chapter eight are limited. They mostly center around the discussion of idols and the eating of meat by Christians that had been dedicated to these idols. Although differing reconstructions of the ancient situation at Corinth have been set forth by modern scholars, the simplest explanation seems to be the one I introduced at the beginning of this study. To be sure all kinds of implications of social intercourse in an idolatrous society by Christians existed and made being faithful to Christ very complex. Ancient Roman society was highly social and evening meals were a critical part of establishing one’s place in society.

b. Literary

Genre. Clearly the broad genre is that of an [ancient letter](#). Thus the contents of the document are prompted by the apostle’s having to write rather than being able to travel to where his readers lived. Thus, letters were “occasional,” that is, they were prompted by a set of circumstances that gave rise to the writing of the document.

This has significance for the interpretive process. We are listening in on one end of a conversation and having to guess at what the party on the other side of the conversation is talking about. Sometimes we understand a fair amount of details of the issue being discussed, but at other times we’re at a loss to know precisely what is prompting the discussion.

Chapter eight represents a middle ground between these two extremes. Some of the details are clear, but the precise nature of the issue remains unclear. Paul clearly defines the topics as dealing with idols and Christians eating meat offered to idols. From Social Scientific analysis of related ancient texts we can understand a great deal of the social pattern of the importance of meal time, especially the evening meal that often was in the form of a banquet. Sometimes this was at private homes, but more often it would be held in the “banquet halls” of ancient temples. These served somewhat as restaurants in the first century Greco-Roman world.

Literary Context. As pointed out above under **External History**, chapter eight stands as the third issue posed by the Corinthians to the apostle Paul in the set of questions comprising the second half



Wall Painting of Banquet in Pompei

of the body of the letter.

Beyond this, however, chapter eight has strong connections to the warnings against idols and idol worship in [chapter ten](#). The content of the two passages seems to be very closely related and revolves around idols and eating food dedicated to them, as 10:18-21 illustrates:

18 Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? 19 What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the

Lord and the table of demons.

In addition Paul seems to be addressing at least a somewhat similar situation in [Romans 14:1-15:13](#), as the first few verses suggest:

14.1 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2 Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3 Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Additionally there is the issue of the Jerusalem council agreement reached in the late 40s and described in [Acts 15](#):

19 Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, 20 *but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood*. 21 For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.” 22 Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, 23 with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, 25 we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: 29 *that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication*. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

The question arises as to whether the Corinthians had paid any attention to this mandate from the apostolic leadership in Jerusalem. It appears that at least some had completely ignored, or possibly,

rejected the terms of this earlier agreement among the Christian leaders of the mid-first century.

The precise situation addressed in all three passages remains a matter of scholarly debate. Richard Hayes (*Interpretation Commentary*, Logos Systems) provides a helpful assessment of these issues:

Paul now takes up another issue from the Corinthians’ letter to him: the problem of “food sacrificed to idols” (*eidōlothyta*). There was some controversy among the Corinthian Christians whether it was permissible to eat meat from animals used in pagan sacrifices. We might expect Paul to give a simple and clear-cut answer to this problem, for elsewhere in the New Testament there is a fiat prohibition against eating such idol meat. This is one of the few fundamental restrictions imposed upon Gentile converts by the decree of the apostolic council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:28–29; see also *Didache* 6.3). The only other mention of the problem in the New Testament occurs in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, where eating idol meat is linked with fornication; the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira are castigated for tolerating such practices (Rev. 2:14, 20). Of course, the fact that such a polemic was necessary shows that the issue was a live one in the churches of Asia Minor near the end of the first century.

In contrast to these other brief New Testament references, Paul does not render a simple judgment; instead he launches into a long and complex argument (8:1–11:1). Indeed, the argument is so complicated that many readers have found it internally contradictory. In 8:1–13 and 10:23–30, Paul seems to hold that idol meat is actually harmless, while nonetheless encouraging the enlightened to abstain for the sake of other people’s scruples. In 10:14–22, however, he seems to prohibit any contact with idol meat: “You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (v. 21b). How do these different parts of the argument fit together, if at all? And how is the long section defending Paul’s refusal of financial support (9:1–27) related to any of this? Some critics have suggested that these chapters do not hang together and must be fragments of different letters. This theory is, however, unnecessary, for the argument does make sense when we read it as a whole. One key to following Paul’s argument is to recognize that he is primarily addressing the problem of sacrificial food consumed *in the temple of the pagan god* (8:10; 10:14, 21). That

There are actually four movements in Paul's treatment of the idol meat problem:

3. Third movement: Warning against idolatry (10:1–22)
4. Conclusion: Use your freedom for the glory of God (10:23–11:1)

The discussion in chapter eight seems to lay the foundation for the larger discussion. In typical Pauline fashion, his thought processes do not move along predicable lines and he can quickly divert from the main subject to explore other issues that are somewhat linked to his main topic.

Literary Structure. The flow of ideas inside chapter eight proceeds along a reasonably clear pattern, as is illustrated from the Greek text analysis in the [Block](#) and [Semantic](#) Diagrams, along with the [Summary of the Rhetorical Structure](#) sections.

First, Paul opens up the theological / philosophical issue of idols and eating meat that has been dedicated to them (vv. 1-6). Then he raises the issue of the weak brother being offended by seeing a fellow believer eating such meat (vv. 7-13).

NLT

1 Now let's talk about food that has been sacrificed to idols. You think that everyone should agree with your perfect knowledge. While knowledge may make us feel important, it is love that really builds up the church. 2 Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. 3 But the person who loves God is the one God knows and cares for. 4 So now, what about it? Should we eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God and no other. 5 According to some people, there are many so-called gods and many lords, both in heaven and on earth. 6 But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we exist for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life.

Notes:

In verses 1-6, Paul **first** sets forth two pairs of axiomatic Christian teaching (vv. 1-3). These are tagged “concerning food sacrificed to idols” (Περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων). Based on the Greek text, these axioms can be charted as follows:

(1) “Knowledge puffs up”

(ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ).

(2) “Love builds up”

(ἡ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ).

(3) “If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.”

(εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι, οὕτω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι)

(4) “if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”

(εἰ δέ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ.)

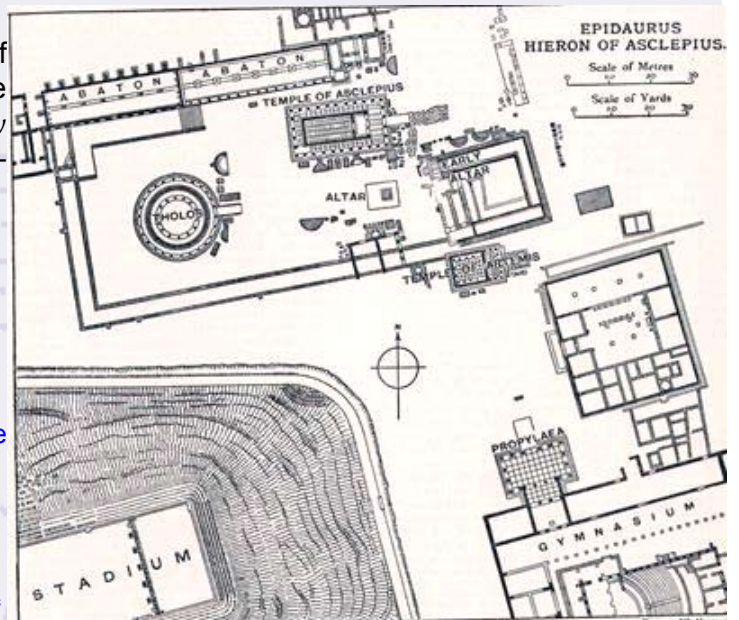
Knowledge and love are juxtaposed against one another in terms of negative / positive impact of each on an individual. Additionally, human knowledge is pitted against divine knowledge. To be certain, this is a distinctly Christian linking of knowledge and love that one would not have typically found elsewhere. The unusual pattern of the Greek expressions has suggested to many that Paul is here quoting axioms commonly found in early Christian teaching, rather than composing them himself.

For Paul these axioms summarize the knowledge that all of us as Christians possess (v. 1; ὅτι πάντες γινῶσιν ἔχομεν), rather than the pseudo-knowledge being claimed by some of the Corinthians.

For some Corinthians, their “knowledge” was justifying participating in banquets held in pagan temples -- partly social and partly business -- and was leading to disdain toward other believers who objected to such practices. The temple of [Asclepius](#) in Corinth (diagram on top right) possessed numerous banquet halls leading off the central sacrificial area, as one example of such opportunity to the Corinthians.

Thus Paul rebuffs the distortion of Christian knowledge by these in Corinth with a linkage of knowledge to love along with a warning of the dangers of knowledge alone.

Drawing implications from this, he next defines true knowing further in verses 4-5. This topic is labeled “concerning eating meat offered to idols” (Περὶ τῆς βρώσεως οὗν τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων). What is it that we



know? Two things: “that ‘no idol in the world really exists,’ and that ‘there is no God but one’” (ὅτι οὐδὲν εἶδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς.). Idols have no real existence; only one God actually exists. In amplifying this in verses 5-6, Paul asserts that:

(1) Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as in fact there are many gods and many lords —

(2) 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.

Paul reaffirmed traditional Jewish monotheism as understood by first century Jews. Christians built on that same principle with the expansion to include Jesus as the divine Son of God. The so-called gods, Zeus, etc. exist as worshiped objects, but have no actual existence. Rather, they are idols, not real gods.

Only the God of Abraham actually exists. In qualifying this Paul affirms that all creation stems from this God. All humans owe their physical existence to God as Creator. Then for Christians, Jesus Christ stands along side God as Father as equally divine and a part of the one true God. In a clear play on Greek prepositions that isn’t so clear in English translation, Paul affirms that God is the source of all creation including us humans (ἐξ οὗ...), and Jesus is the means of God’s creative activity (δι’ οὗ...). God created all things, and He worked through Jesus to achieve this.

Thus the exclusive existence of God as Father and of Jesus as Lord clearly implies that dedicating



meat to these 'dead' gods with no actual existence would have zero impact on that meat. This much Paul affirms to

existence to any other deity claimed by other religions. The many gods of Hinduism are nothing but idols, pseudo-gods worshiped but having no actual spiritual existence. The Islamic worship of Allah is false and in reality the worship of an idol. The Buddhist worship of deity is false and based on idol worship. While not popular in a modern pluralistic world, this none the less is the historic position of Christianity that is anchored directly in the teachings of Jesus and of the apostles, such as our text. To say that all religions worship the same essential deity is gross error and for Christians deadly heresy.

The knowledge given to believers by God through Jesus is without question a superior understanding of spiritual reality. But it must be linked to love, or else it turns into spiritual pride and elitism. Just as happened at Corinth. And this in turns becomes spiritually destructive.

But linking knowledge to love has a distinctive tone to it in Paul's words here. Love is the divine love we have experienced in Jesus Christ. To love God brings "being known" by God. God envelopes our lives with His understanding. And this understanding from God is what enables us to see the exclusivity of God's own existence and the clearly defined non-existence of all other gods claiming existence.

Heavy stuff! But basic and foundational to correct and spiritually healthy Christian understanding.

the so-called "stronger" brothers.

What does all this have to do with us? Several implications flow out of Paul's words here. For one thing, Christianity and Judaism stand together in affirming the exclusive existence of but one God, the God of Abraham. But Christianity parts with Judaism in also affirming that the one God includes Jesus Christ as well as fully divine and a part of the godhead.

Christianity positions itself in a view that denies

b. Consideration of a brother, vv. 7-13

LXX

7 Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γνῶσις· τινὲς δὲ τῇ συνηθείᾳ ἕως ἄρτι τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενὴς οὕσα μολύνεται. 8 βρῶμα δὲ ἡμᾶς οὐ παρὰ στήσει τῷ θεῷ· οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν. 9 βλέπετε δὲ μή πως ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη πρόσκομμα γένηται τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν. 10 ἐὰν γάρ τις ἴδῃ σὲ τὸν ἔχοντα γνῶσιν ἐν εἰδωλείῳ κατακείμενον, οὐχὶ ἡ συνείδησις

NASB

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

NRSV

7 It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if others see you, who

NLT

7 However, not all Christians realize this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. 8 It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't miss out on anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do. 9 But you must be careful with this freedom of yours. Do not cause a brother

αὐτοῦ ἀσθενοῦς ὄντος οἰκοδομηθήσεται εἰς τὸ τὰ εἰδωλόθυτα ἐσθίειν; 11 ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἀσθενῶν ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν. 12 οὕτως δὲ ἁμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τύπτοντες αὐτῶν τὴν συνείδησιν ἀσθενοῦσαν εἰς Χριστὸν ἁμαρτάνετε. 13 διόπερ εἰ βρῶμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, οὐ μὴ φάγω κρέα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἵνα μὴ τὸν ἀδελφόν μου σκανδαλίσω.

Notes:

Paul moves in verse seven to set up a strong contrast to his earlier foundational statement in verse four: “[we know that....](#)” We as believers know this, but now the apostle asserts: “[It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge](#)” (Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γνώσις). Clearly in a polytheistic world not everyone would agree with the strong stance on monotheism taken by Jews, and especially by Christians. But is Paul's contrast between knowing and not knowing contrasting Christian understanding with non-Christian understanding? At first it might seem so, but deeper into the text it becomes clear that the apostle is discussing this from an “insider” perspective. And thus the NLT translators clearly get Paul's point in their rendering of the Greek as “[However, not all Christians realize this.](#)” In this discussion he is focused on folks inside the Christian community, not on those outside.

Does his contrast easily imply that Jewish Christians have the knowledge, and Gentile Christians do not? Often this assumption has been taken for granted in the interpretive history of the passage. Increasingly today scholars are seeing that reading such assumptions into these statements are at best risky and in general very questionable. Monotheistic thinking can be found in the Greco-Roman world apart from either Jewish or Christian influence. Also, denial of monotheistic views can be documented among scattered spheres of ancient Jews as well. Clearly the Christian assertion of monotheism has its foundations in ancient Judaism. But it doesn't imply that Christians affirming this view had to have come out of Judaism, and that those not yet in this view had no Jewish heritage.

Who then are these without knowledge? Verse 7b answers this: “[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](#)” (τινὲς δὲ τῇ συνηθείᾳ ἕως ἄρτι τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενὴς οὕσα μολύνεται.). These are the so-called ‘weak brothers.’ What Paul describes is a Christian eating this meat but without being fortified with the knowledge that the gods, the meat was dedicated to, don't really exist and so nothing happened to the meat in its dedication before the meal. They have grown up thinking that these gods

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.

possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? 11 So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. 12 But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

or sister with a weaker conscience to stumble. 10 You see, this is what can happen: Weak Christians who think it is wrong to eat this food will see you eating in the temple of an idol. You know there's nothing wrong with it, but they will be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been dedicated to the idol. 11 So because of your superior knowledge, a weak Christian, for whom Christ died, will be destroyed. 12 And you are sinning against Christ when you sin against other Christians by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong. 13 If what I eat is going to make another Christian sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live – for I don't want to make another Christian stumble.



do actually exist and even in Christian conversion they haven't yet completely shook loose from that conviction. Thus when they eat the meat their conscience convinces them that they're doing something wrong and against the principles of their Christian faith. Social pressure -- which was enormous in that world -- and / or business interests compelled them to eat the meat, but in so doing they violated their internal sense of right and wrong. What Paul sees here is simply a "weak conscience." That is, a internal moral thermostat not yet sufficiently informed by Christian teaching on monotheism. But in violating that sense of moral correctness, they are doing great harm to their spiritual lives. Their conscience is *μολύνεται*, that is, being defiled, being corrupted, being compromised. For the apostle one must live with a clear *conscience* of having put forth the very best effort to obey fully God's instructions. To violate that does spiritual harm to one's life.

He then in verse 8 reaffirms the "knowledge" view by saying:

"Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

βρῶμα δὲ ἡμᾶς οὐ παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ· οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν.

The reality is that the meat itself had no impact on these believers, nor on their spiritual status before God. Food itself has absolutely no spiritual value! Nor benefit! The spiritual harm came in their violating their conscience by eating the food, not in eating the food itself.

Next in verses 9-13, he turns to fellow Christians in knowledge eating this food dedicated to idols while one of these "weaker" brothers observes what they are doing. Here is where the link of love to knowledge earlier comes to the forefront.

First, he poses the issue via a warning:

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

βλέπετε δὲ μή πως ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη πρόσκομμα γένηται τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν.

Interestingly, most English translators render the Greek ἡ ἐξουσία as 'liberty,' while it actually means 'authority,' 'right,' 'authorization,' etc. Paul's point is that although certain activities are perfectly legitimate for us as Christians they may need to be waived in consideration of our fellow believer.

Paul follows his warning with a rhetorical question posing the situation of Christians eating meat in a pagan temple:

For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?

ἐὰν γάρ τις ἴδῃ σὲ τὸν ἔχοντα γνῶσιν ἐν εἰδωλείῳ κατακείμενον, οὐχὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτοῦ ἀσθενοῦς ὄντος οἰκοδομηθήσεται εἰς τὸ τὰ εἰδωλόθυτα ἐσθίειν;

The situation is posed as a hypothetical one, via the third class conditional protasis sentence structure in the Greek. The "knowledgeable" believer eats the meat in a pagan temple setting while the "unknowledgeable" believer observes and is thereby encouraged to eat even violating his own conscience about the rightness of eating.

What is the impact of this negative example to the weaker brother? Verses 11-12 provide Paul's response:

11 So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. 12 But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

11 ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἀσθενῶν ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν. 12 οὕτως δὲ ἁμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τύπτοντες αὐτῶν τὴν συνείδησιν ἀσθενοῦσαν εἰς Χριστὸν ἁμαρτάνετε.

First, the knowledgeable brother ruins the spiritual life of the weaker brother by this knowledge that has not been linked up to love. Second, in so harming one's spiritual brother the knowledgeable Christian sins both against the spiritual family he belongs to, and he sins against Christ. This is a double whammy of negative impact!

Paul then concludes (διόπερ) by appealing to his personal stance in such matters:

Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

διόπερ εἰ βρῶμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, οὐ μὴ φάγω κρέα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἵνα μὴ τὸν ἀδελφόν μου σκανδαλίσω.

If Paul's eating such food offered to idols causes spiritual harm to a brother, then Paul would not ever eat such food again!. Concern for fellow believers overrides his legitimate rights and privileges. Here is where linking love to knowledge becomes the distinctive Christian viewpoint. Here Paul uses real diplomacy. He framed the stance in a first person perspective reflecting his own view. But he also couched the issue in a first class conditional protasis

sentence which assumes that offense was happening. Thus he issues a mild warning to the knowledgeable believers to link love to their knowledge. That's the only way to prevent knowledge from "puffing" one up in pride and arrogance.

What can we learn from this situation at Corinth that can help us serve Christ? Richard Hayes (*Interpretation*, Logos Systems) offers some stimulating suggestions:

The interpreter of 1 Corinthians 8 must help the congregation to see the specific matter of idol meat as a trigger issue that poses larger problems of perennial concern to the church. To read the Corinthians' mail as a letter to us, we must consider what contemporary issues present our churches with temptations and conflicts analogous to those presented to ancient first-generation Christians by the pagan temples in their midst. Our reflections about this matter may be grouped under four headings.

1. *Boundaries between church and culture.* Can Christians fit into the social world of their surrounding culture? Or must they withdraw altogether from "normal" social practices that represent participation in symbolic orders alien to the gospel? Where are the lines to be drawn between acceptable accommodation to the realities of the culture and unacceptable compromise? Questions such as these always arise for the church in a missionary setting (such as first-century Corinth) where the gospel encounters a new cultural context. Converts to the faith must work out how to reorder their lives in obedience to Christ, discerning which old customs may be continued and which must be left behind. For example, Korean students have reported to me that 1 Corinthians 8 reminds them of disputes in their own churches about whether Christians must abandon traditional meals venerating ancestors. Some see these traditions as harmless honoring of the memory of family members; others see them as a form of idolatry.

But such problems are hardly confined to churches in non-Western cultures. Similar questions must also be posed to Christian churches that have grown comfortably familiar with their cultural setting. As the world becomes increasingly secular and pluralistic, we find ourselves in a situation more like that of the first-century Christians, having to rethink our allegiances in fundamental ways. First Corinthians 8 encourages us to shine a spotlight on our own social networks to

see whether perhaps we are unwittingly eating in the temples of the idols that surround us. One obvious point of conflict might arise with regard to the participation of church members in clubs and fraternal orders outside the church: Masons, Shriners, Eastern Star, and so forth. What kinds of commitment, religious or quasireligious, is required or implied by participation in such groups? One student recently told me that she had been asked by some members of her church to join a women's group called The Daughters of Isis! After some reflection, she decided that as a Christian she could not associate herself with such a group. That seems a fairly clear-cut case, but what about other societies and subcultures that claim our loyalties—college fraternities and sororities, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Rifle Association, and so forth? Paul's words to the Corinthians

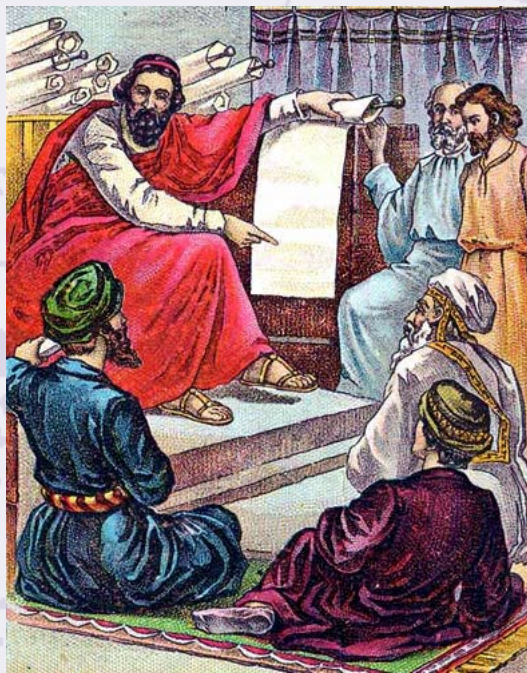
should cause us to look closely at all such external attachments and ask whether they are really consistent with our allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Indeed, the exclusive lordship of Jesus stands as a challenge to many arrangements that we take for granted. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not, and any form of nationalism can turn into a form of idolatry. If we display national flags in our churches, are we leading the weak to lose sight of the distinctiveness of Christian discipleship and to confuse faith with patriotism? Perhaps the most insidious form of idolatry for churches in the United States is the idolatry of materialism. In the name of freedom and individual rights, Christians enmesh themselves in economic practices that draw their

loyalty from Christ and divide the community of faith by disregarding the poor.

The fundamental question underlying all these issues is whether monotheistic faith by definition sanctions pluralism (as the *gnōsis* group at Corinth contended) or whether monotheistic faith requires exclusivity, expressed in clear separation from the symbolic world of pagan culture (as the weak contended). In chapter 8, Paul has not yet given an answer to this question, but he has called those who possess "knowledge" to attend respectfully to the concerns of the weak.

2. *Class divisions in the church.* Paul does not confront this problem directly in 1 Corinthians 8, but by reading between the lines we have seen that the idol meat problem had a socioeconomic dimension. Having recognized this, we might look again at the disputes in our own congregations and denominations and ask whether there is also a similar economic substratum to our quarrels. If so, we might ponder the fact that



Paul places the onus for flexibility on those with more education and economic resources. To the dismay of the “strong” at Corinth, he refuses to take their side against the weak; instead, he calls the strong to surrender what they understand as their legitimate prerogatives for the sake of the weak. What would it mean for us to do likewise?

Furthermore, this text calls Christians who have many possessions to beware of easy rationalizations that treat the world of everyday affairs as religiously neutral, thereby permitting them to continue enjoying their privileged lives. Theissen (136) tellingly describes the position of the high-status Corinthians: “The world is rejected in a theoretical way in order to profit from it in a practical way—the usual verbal radicalism of the affluent.”

3. *Love trumps knowledge.* The central message of this chapter is a simple one: Love is more important than knowledge. Paul calls for a shift from *gnōsis* to *agapē* as the ordering principle for Christian discernment and conduct. Rather than asserting rights and privileges, we are to shape our actions toward edification of our brothers and sisters in the community of faith. In so doing, we will be following the example of Christ, who died for the weak (v. 11), and also the example of Paul, who is willing to renounce all meat in order to keep his brothers and sisters from stumbling (v. 13). The *gnōsis*-boasters frame their decisions and actions in terms of their own *exousia*, looking to the cultivation of their own spiritual freedom and sophistication as their highest end; Paul calls them instead to look to the cultivation of loving community as the goal of Christian action. Every congregation will profit from looking at themselves in the mirror of 1 Corinthians 8 and asking whether there are ways in which they are using knowledge as a weapon rather than as an instrument of love. Whether Bible-thumping certainty about revealed truth, or serene confidence in the latest scientific findings, or passionate discernment of the “right” social causes, any “knowledge” that divides the community and causes the knowledgeable ones to despise those who are ignorant or uncertain is not being used in the service of God.

4. *The danger of destruction through idolatry.* The “stumbling block principle” is often erroneously invoked to place limits on the behavior of some Christians whose conduct offends other Christians with stricter behavioral standards. For example, it is argued that if drinking alcohol or dancing or dressing in certain ways might cause offense to more scrupulous church members, we

are obligated to avoid such behaviors for the sake of the “weaker brother’s conscience.” The effect of such reasoning is to hold the entire Christian community hostage to the standards of the most narrow-minded and legalistic members of the church. Clearly, this is not what Paul intended. He is concerned in 1 Corinthians 8 about weaker believers being “destroyed” by being drawn away from the church and back into idol worship. Therefore, in applying this text analogically to our time, we should be careful to frame analogies only to those situations in which the boundary-defying actions of the “strong” might actually jeopardize the faith and salvation of others by leading the weak to emulate high-risk behaviors. Framing the analogy in this way will significantly limit the number of situations to which the text is directly relevant.

A corollary of this point, however, is that idolatry can actually lead to destruction. This was denied by the *gnōsis* group at Corinth, but Paul solemnly warns of the danger in dabbling with idolatrous practices. The seductive lure of idolatry is real, and the destructive power of the pagan world is real. Members of the church who are drawn away from God will suffer irreparable loss. If we are tempted to be casual about dalliances with the idols that rule our culture’s symbolic world (primarily the gods of wealth, military power, and self-gratification), we would do well to reread 1 Corinthians 8 and consider the possible risks for those among us who are seeking to escape the pull of these forces. Our first concern should be to preserve the symbolic integrity of the church in such a way that weaker members will be protected from these destructive temptations.

While not necessarily agreeing with all that Prof. Hayes concludes, I will say that he does provoke us to thinking about how a higher level of spiritual knowledge can turn negative, if not linked to the principle of Christian love for God and for others. Clearly this is the central point of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. Spiritual elitism is very subtle and at the same time very destructive of a healthy relationship with Christ.

Successfully linking love with knowledge and then understanding how to apply that combination to individual situations is quite challenging. But with God’s help through the leadership of the Holy Spirit we can certainly make that application correctly. May God give us wisdom to apply this to our daily living!



Greek NT

1 Περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, οἶδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γινώσκιν ἔχομεν. ἡ γινώσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ. 2 εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι, οὕτω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι. 3 εἰ δέ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. 4 Περὶ τῆς βρώσεως οὖν τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὐδὲν εἰδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς. 5 καὶ γὰρ εἶπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοὶ εἴτε ἐν οὐρανῷ εἴτε ἐπὶ γῆς, ὥσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοὶ, 6 ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ.

7 Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γινώσις· **τινὲς δὲ τῇ συνθηκῇ** ἕως ἄρτι τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενὴς οὕσα μολύνεται. 8 βρώμα δὲ ἡμᾶς οὐ παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ· οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν. 9 βλέπετε δὲ μή πως ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη πρόσκομμα γένηται τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν. 10 ἐὰν γὰρ τις ἴδῃ σὲ τὸν ἔχοντα γινῶσιν ἐν εἰδωλείῳ κατακείμενον, οὐχὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτοῦ ἀσθενοῦς ὄντος οἰκοδομηθήσεται εἰς τὸ τὰ εἰδωλόθυτα ἐσθίειν; 11 ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἀσθενῶν ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν. 12 οὕτως δὲ ἁμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τύπτοντες αὐτῶν τὴν συνείδησιν ἀσθενοῦσαν εἰς Χριστὸν

NASB

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

NRSV

1 Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 2 Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; 3 but anyone who loves God is known by him. 4 Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." 5 Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as in fact 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.

7 It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if others see you, who possess knowledge,

NLT

1 Now let's talk about food that has been sacrificed to idols. You think that everyone should agree with your perfect knowledge. While knowledge may make us feel important, it is love that really builds up the church. 2 Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. 3 But the person who loves God is the one God knows and cares for. 4 So now, what about it? Should we eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God and no other. 5 According to some people, there are many so-called gods and many lords, both in heaven and on earth. 6 But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we exist for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life.

7 However, not all Christians realize this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. 8 It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we

ἀμαρτάνετε. 13 διόπερ εἰ
βρῶμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν
ἀδελφόν μου, οὐ μὴ φάγω
κρέα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἵνα μὴ
τὸν ἀδελφόν μου σκανδα-
λίσω.

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.

eating in the temple of
an idol, might they not,
since their conscience is
weak, be encouraged to
the point of eating food
sacrificed to idols? 11
So by your knowledge
those weak believers for
whom Christ died are
destroyed. 12 But when
you thus sin against
members of your family,
and wound their con-
science when it is weak,
you sin against Christ.
13 Therefore, if food is
a cause of their falling,
I will never eat meat, so
that I may not cause one
of them to fall.

eat. We don't miss out
on anything if we don't
eat it, and we don't gain
anything if we do. 9 But
you must be careful with
this freedom of yours.
Do not cause a brother
or sister with a weaker
conscience to stum-
ble. 10 You see, this is
what can happen: Weak
Christians who think it
is wrong to eat this food
will see you eating in the
temple of an idol. You
know there's nothing
wrong with it, but they
will be encouraged to
violate their conscience
by eating food that has
been dedicated to the
idol. 11 So because of
your superior knowl-
edge, a weak Chris-
tian, for whom Christ
died, will be destroyed.
12 And you are sinning
against Christ when you
sin against other Chris-
tians by encouraging
them to do something
they believe is wrong.
13 If what I eat is going
to make another Chris-
tian sin, I will never eat
meat again as long as I
live – for I don't want to
make another Christian
stumble.

Greek NT Block Diagram

1 δὲ
1 **Περὶ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων,**
οἶδαμεν
ὅτι πάντες γινώσιν ἔχομεν.
2 ἢ γινώσιν φυσιοῖ,
3 δὲ
3 ἢ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ.
2 εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνῶκέναι τι,
4 **οὕτω ἔγνω**
καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι·
3 δέ
5 εἰ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν,
οὗτος ἔγνωσται
ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.
4 οὖν
6 **Περὶ τῆς βρώσεως τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων,**
οἶδαμεν
ὅτι οὐδὲν εἰδωλον (ἐστίν)
ἐν κόσμῳ
καὶ
ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς (ἐστίν)
εἰ μὴ εἷς.
5 γὰρ
καὶ
εἵπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοὶ
εἴτε ἐν οὐρανῷ
εἴτε ἐπὶ γῆς,
7 ὥσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ
καὶ
6 κύριοι πολλοί,
6 ἀλλ'
8 ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ (ἐστίν)
ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα
καὶ
9 ἡμεῖς (ἐστίν)
εἰς αὐτόν,
καὶ
10 εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς (ἐστίν)
δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα
καὶ
ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ.

7 ἄλλ'
11 οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γινῶσις (ἐστίν)
δὲ
τῇ συνηθείᾳ
ἕως ἄρτι
τοῦ εἰδώλου
ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον
12 τινὲς . . . ἐσθίουσιν,
καὶ
ἀσθενὴς οὔσα
13 ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν . . . μολύνεται.
8 δὲ
14 βρῶμα ἡμᾶς οὐ παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ·
οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα,
οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν.
9 δὲ
15 βλέπετε
μὴ πως ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη πρόσκομμα γένηται τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν.
10 γάρ
ἐὰν τις ἴδῃ σὲ
τὸν ἔχοντα γινῶσιν
ἐν εἰδωλείῳ κατακείμενον,
ἀσθενοῦς ὄντος
16 οὐχὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτοῦ . . . οἰκοδομηθήσεται
εἰς τὸ τὰ εἰδωλόθута ἐσθίειν;
11 γὰρ
17 ἀπόλλυται ὁ ἀσθενῶν
ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει,
ὁ ἀδελφὸς
δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν.
12 δὲ
οὕτως
ἁμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς
καὶ
τύπτοντες αὐτῶν τὴν συνείδησιν
ἀσθενοῦσαν
εἰς Χριστὸν
18 ἀμαρτάνετε.
13 διόπερ
εἰ βρῶμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν ἀδελφόν μου,
19 οὐ μὴ φάγω κρέα
εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα,
ἵνα μὴ τὸν ἀδελφόν μου σκανδαλίσω.

Semantic Diagram

		1	-----	1	δὲ	Perf	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)	
A				i	-----	2	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	ἡ γνῶσις
				a	-----							
					-----	3	Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	ἡ ἀγάπη
2					-----							
I				i	-----	4	2 Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	(αὐτός)
				b	-----							
				ii	-----	5	Fut	Pass	Ind	3	S	οὗτος

					-----	6	οὖν Perf	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
B					-----							
				a	-----	7	γὰρ Pres	---	Ind	3	P	θεοὶ πολλοὶ

2				a)	-----	8	ἀλλ' (Pres	---	Ind	3	S)	ὁ πατήρ
				i	-----							
				b	-----	9	καὶ (Pres	---	Ind	1	P)	ἡμεῖς
				b)	-----							
					-----	10	καὶ (Pres	---	Ind	3	S)	Ἰησοῦς Χριστός
				ii	-----							
					-----	11	Ἄλλ' (Pres	---	Ind	3	S)	ἡ γνῶσις

				a	-----	12	δὲ Pres	Act	Ind	3	P	τινὲς
A					-----							
2				b	-----	13	καὶ Pres	Pass	Ind	3	S	ἡ συνείδησις

					-----	14	δὲ Pres	Act	Ind	3	S	βρῶμα

					-----	15	δὲ Pres	Act	Imp	2	P	(ὕμεῖς)
1					-----							
II					-----	16	γὰρ Fut	Pass	Ind	3	S	ἡ συνείδησις
B				a	-----							

2					-----	17	γὰρ Pres	Dep	Ind	3	S	ὁ ἀσθενῶν
				b	-----							
					-----	18	δὲ Pres	Act	Ind	2	P	(ὕμεῖς)
C					-----							
					-----	19	διόπερ Fut	Act	Ind	1	S	(ἐγὼ)

Summary of Rhetorical Structure

The thought flow of these verses revolves around two central points. First, Paul raises the theological / philosophical question about eating meat offered to idols (statements 1-10). Second, the issue of the impact of one's action on fellow believers is discussed (statements 11-19).

In the first section (#s 1-10), the ideas are broken down into two subdivisions, both of which begin the exact same way *Περὶ ..., οἷδ' αὖμεν ὅτι ...* (#s 1 & 6). The first subsection plays off the topic sentence expression (#1) on the non-existence of idols with two pairs of gnomic expressions (#s. 2-3 and 4-5), which stand parallel to each other. The contrast is between knowledge (#s 2, 4) and love (#s. 3, 5). The first pair (#s 2-3) is simple timeless principle expression using the gnomic function of the Greek present tense verbs. The second pair (#s 4-5) are couched in the first class conditional protasis structures in the Greek posing an assumed reality among Paul's readers. Thus Paul moves from principle to application.

The second subset (#s 6-10) structure Paul's ideas differently. The inferential conjunction οὖν in # 6 seeks to state directly something perceived as implicit in the previous section. In other words, what does the discussion of principle and application in #s 1-5 imply? Statements 6-10 answers this with the general principle on knowledge restated in # 6 from a slightly different angle. Now the focus is on eating meat that has been sacrificed to these non-existing idols. Two points are made in the topic sentence of statement # 6: (1) idols don't have real existence, but (2) God does exist.

This is then buttressed by a two fold (positive / negative) set of arguments introduced by the causal conjunction γὰρ in statement 7. On one side (# 7) Paul affirms that many gods can be found in his world. But in reality there is but one God, the Father (#s 8-9) and one Lord, Jesus Christ (#10). These along have true existence as deity.

But Paul doesn't stop at the philosophical / theological side of the issue. Another aspect has equal importance for believers: how to use this knowledge in constructive rather than destructive ways (#s. 11-19). This is important because the issue for believers is always a matter of both knowledge and love, not just knowledge alone.

This 'applicational' section is broken down into two segments. First, in statements 11-14, Paul affirms that not every believer possesses the above knowledge of the non-existence of idols. Some believers are eating the sacrificed meat without this knowledge and it is doing them severe harm spiritually (#s. 12-13). Statement 14 comes back to affirm that eating or not eating meat has no impact on our status before God.

Then he issues a warning in statement 15 that he readers not use this knowledge foolishly about the non-existence of idols and the fact that eating / not eating has no impact on us spiritually. In a third class protasis structure in statement 16 Paul poses the hypothetical issue of one of these 'weak brothers' seeing his fellow Christian eating this sacrificed meat. Will they not be encouraged to also eat this meat. And in so doing they will bring spiritual ruin upon their lives (#17). Not from the meat, but from violating their sense of conviction of right and wrong before God, that is, their conscience. So in statement 18, Paul declares that for believers to knowingly eat sacrificed meat in the presence of these 'weak' believers becomes for them a sin against both their 'weak' brother and against God. Paul concludes with a personal declaration of being willing to not ever eat meat if it will make a fellow believer stumble before God (#19).