

1Corinthians 8

"Big Brother, Big Sister"

Okay. So a little about me. I am an older brother; an eldest child, a.k.a.: the "responsible one." By a show of hands, how many big brothers and big sisters do we have in the room today? **(pause)** Being the big brother in my family meant a couple of things. It meant when my parents would have to leave my brother and I at home alone I was in charge. Did any of y'all have to do that? **(pause)** If my parents came home and the house was a wreck, who did the blame fall hardest on? **(pause)** Me! Why? **(pause)** Because I am the big brother. **(pause)** As the eldest child I had a later bed time than my little brother; however, occasionally I would be asked to go to bed at my little brother's bed time to make it easier to put my brother Ryan to bed. I was allowed to stay up later because I was older, but sometimes I was asked to go to bed early when my little brother was being challenging. Did any of y'all ever have to set a good example for a younger sibling? **(pause, and raise my hand)**

I think that's what Paul is doing in this letter to the Corinthians. Corinth was a large trade town. There were people coming and going from a lot of different places. However, religion was important to most people, and when they came through Corinth they would want to spend time at the temple of their "g"od. In Corinth, there were little shrines to a lot of little "g"ods. Each of these little temples would offer animal sacrifices to their "g"od. There was so much meat and food offered to idols that it was a common practice to sell the cooked meat in the market place. This is part of what Paul means when Paul talks about eating food offered to idols. Some of these small temples acted as restaurants where people would go and eat in the presence of these little "g"ods.

For Jews this was a huge problem. Jews were forbidden to eat food offered to idols. The idea was if they ate food offered to idols they were worshipping these false, little "g"ods. Sisters and brothers what is the first of the ten commandments? **(pause)** "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). And when it comes to unclean animals, "Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you" (Lev 11:8). **(pause)** Brothers and sisters, if we take that one seriously we're gonna have a big problem with the Super Bowl because footballs are commonly made out of pig skin. **(pause)** Thank God most basket balls today are made out of rubber.

Food offered to idols was a problem for the Gentiles who wanted to be Christians as well. Paul was there at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 when James, the brother of Jesus stands up to declare, "my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues" (Acts 15:19-21).

Apparently, the reason for this rule is because those who are new to their faith, as the Hebrews were at the base of Mt. Sinai, and the Gentile converts were in many parts of Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, can easily fall back into confusion and believing there really are a multitude of different "g"ods to worship. Those who are mature in their faith know the truth. There is only one God. **(pause)** There is only one God! Amen? **Amen.** There is only one God! Amen?! **Amen!** Since there is only one God then it does not matter where you eat, or from where the meat comes. What matters is whether you believe this food can be blessed by idols made with human hands out of wood, stone and metal. These false idols cannot bless anything. They

are not real. Only the Lord God Almighty can bless animals sacrificed to God. Only Jesus Christ could be the sacrifice whose blood washed away all of our sins.

Paul is recognizing that the mature in their faith are securely connected to the rock of Christ Jesus. They know there is only one God, and all of these idols are worthless. As such, mature Christians ought to be able to eat just about anywhere they please. However, immature Christians, are like my little brother was when he was little. They are watching the mature Christians either looking for a stumble or fall to dismiss the Christian faith all together, or they are waiting for the mistake. They are waiting for the mature Christian to make a mistake which justifies their own bad behavior. Paul is urging those who are mature in their faith to abstain from eating meat offered to idols to keep from putting a stumbling block in the path of those whose faith journey has just begun. Paul is urging those who are mature in their faith not to use their knowledge as an excuse to behave in ways that cause others to stumble.

Paul argues, “‘Knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up” (1Cor 8:1). If all our knowledge about God does lead us to behave in ways that cause others to stumble, then we have become the answer to why there are so many atheists in the world today.

I knew this guy. He could quote the Bible inside and out by chapter and verse; and yet in his brokenness he used his knowledge of Scripture to judge people and run them down.

Brennan Manning said, “The single leading cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who praise God with their lips and then walk out the door and are completely disarmed by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.”

Through this guy I discovered the truth of Paul’s words in 1Corinthians 13:1, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

My sisters and brothers, Paul is not asking the Corinthians if they know enough about God and what is in the Scriptures to do what God says. Paul is asking the mature in their faith in Corinth if they love God enough to love their neighbor enough not to eat food that has been offered to idols. Paul is not saying this is the Law, and they should obey it because Paul says so. Paul is arguing the mature in their faith should behave in such a way as to keep others from falling to temptation because of the way God loves us. Paul sets the example saying, “If food is a cause of my brother’s falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall” (1Cor 8:13).

Brothers and sisters the Great Commission states we are to, “[g]o therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;” (Matt 28:19-20). If we use our liberty in Christ in ways that cause those who are new in their faith to falter, then we are cutting our noses off to spite our faces. **(pause)** We are not doing the job Christ has given us to do. To quote Bo Diddley, “Who do you love?”¹ **(pause)** Do we love God enough to put others growth and discipleship ahead of our liberty? Has our knowledge of God puffed us up so we think we are superior to God, or have we grown in our love for God that another’s depth of faith is more important than our immediate comfort? Are we yet mature in our faith?

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who_Do_You_Love%3F_\(Bo_Diddley_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who_Do_You_Love%3F_(Bo_Diddley_song)) (viewed 1-24-17)