

Proper Care And Feeding of Weaker Brothers

1 Corinthians, Vol. 13

HBC 2/5/20

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Your Conscience

The word **conscience** is from the Greek word *suneidesis* in the New Testament. The literal root meaning is “knowing with.” Your conscience is your built-in sense of right and wrong. It compares (knows one thing alongside another) what you do with what you know, and renders a verdict that you are guilty or innocent. The New Testament describes three kinds of conscience.

The Good Conscience (1 Timothy 1:5). The person with a good conscience knows what is truly right and wrong according to Scripture.

The Seared Conscience (1 Timothy 4:2). This conscience is damaged. No one begins life with a seared conscience (Romans 2:14-15). Even religious people can have a seared conscience (Titus 1:15-16).

The Weak Conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12, Romans 14:1ff.) The person with a weak conscience doesn't fully understand what Christ had done for us, and isn't sure what is actually sin. Therefore this person reacts to things as if they are sin when they are not.

I. **Accurate Knowledge** (1-6)

1 Corinthians 8:1: *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.*

Now concerning:

We all have knowledge:

We know implies there was a pride problem. They felt they knew all they needed to know. Paul he agreed that they knew all about their liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols. **Knowledge makes arrogant** (“puffs up”). That implies the sin of **pride**.

Love edifies. Love—the kind we will meet in chapter 13—seeks the good of others, improves relationships, and leads to good deeds. Paul uses the word **edifies** (“builds up”) to describe building up Christian character in one another.

1 Corinthians 8:2-3: *If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.*

Supposes describes the person who believes he or she has the best answers and therefore believes others should hold the same convictions.

Until you can honestly say that you **love God** you cannot truly say that you and He **know one another**.

1 Corinthians 8:4: 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.

“No such thing as an idol in the world” might well be another quote from a letter someone in Corinth sent to Paul. See further explanation in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20.

1 Corinthians 8:5-6: For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 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.

This is carefully worded and very important! There is **one** God, and He exists in **three persons**. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the only true God. **The word became flesh** (John 1:14). There is only **one Lord**, or Master, and it is Jesus, who was the **agent** of creation and is the **sustainer** of creation.

II. **Appropriate Concern** (7-12)

1 Corinthians 8:7-12: 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. 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. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 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? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

You need to realize that some Christians have a **weak conscience**, and therefore they are **overly sensitive** to things. The one with a weak conscience is **easily disheartened by a false sense of guilt**.

Gray areas are things God does not address in Scripture, as to whether you must do them or must avoid them. The **responsibility lies with** the one whose conscience is **most mature**, to take care not to offend weaker brothers and sisters, but also to gently and tenaciously educate them so they become more mature.

III. **Adamant Love** (13)

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.*

cause to stumble means “lead into sin,” or at least to lead into something that the person feels like is sin. Don't set such a trap for anyone! It never serves any good purpose to assert your **rights** to exercise your liberty in the presence of weaker brothers and sisters.

Two Important Definitions

The Weaker Brother (or sister) is one who does not fully understand what God says is sin and what God does not say is sin. Therefore if he does something he *thinks might be sin*, his conscience bothers him and he mistakenly feels he is out of fellowship with God and guilty of something.

The Mature Brother (or sister) is the Christian who knows what is sin and what is not sin, and is therefore able to understand and use his liberty in Christ to do anything that is not sin without his conscience bothering him.

The Professional Weaker Brother

- <> Evaluates a gray area as wrong for him **and** for everyone else as well.
- <> Concludes that everyone that participates in that gray area is guilty of sin.
- <> Easily becomes critical of other Christians and readily judges them.
- <> Is adamantly committed to his own standards of right and wrong, and almost never changes.

Matthew 7:1–2: *Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*

Romans 14:3b: . . . *the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.*

The Susceptible Weaker Brother

- <> Evaluates a gray area as maybe or probably wrong for him.
- <> Concludes that it might not be wrong for every Christian.
- <> Is in danger of being led into participating without full understanding of freedom, and therefore can trigger his over-sensitive conscience and wrongly feel condemned.
- <> This is the one that 1 Corinthians 8 warns us to treat with love and patience.

Romans 14:23: *But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.*

The Non-participating Mature Brother

- <> Evaluates a gray area as dangerous and maybe sinful, and therefore does not participate. Even if he doesn't believe it is sin, he chooses to refrain for his own safety and comfort.
- <> Concludes that the same thing can be sin for one believer, but not sin for another (depending on the state of the conscience).
- <> Is in danger of slipping into believing that a participating believer would be more spiritual if he would stop participating in the gray area.
- <> Is likely to be afraid of dealing with unbelievers whose behavior causes discomfort.

Romans 14:4: *Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

The Participating Mature Brother

- <> Evaluates gray areas knowing he has freedom to participate or refrain, depending on what will best allow him to serve God in any situation.
- <> Concludes that gray areas are acceptable to him, even if not for others, especially if it helps him build relationships with unbelievers for preaching the gospel.
- <> In danger of succumbing to judgmental pressure from a professional weaker brother, or causing a susceptible weaker brother to stumble, or abusing his liberty for self indulgence or to flaunt it.
- <> Understands he should seek to be all things to all men that he might be all means save some by doing all things for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:22-23).

Romans 14:20–22: *Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*

Galatians 5:13: *For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*