

1 Corinthians 8
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1 Corinthians 8:13 *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*

Context of 1 Corinthians 8 – the Apostle Paul had written to the Corinthians to cover a number of issues they were struggling with. In chapter 8 he addresses eating meat sacrificed to idols. He begins by saying that idols are empty, meaningless things, and that there are no gods apart from God. Additionally, all foods/meats are clean, and can be eaten without condition. But not all know this, and this was Paul's concern. To us it does not matter (liberty), but to others it may, and we need to use liberty to avoid offending others and causing them to sin.

This teaching is a parallel to Romans 14:

1 Corinthians 8:8 *But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.*

Romans 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

For many, the trouble is a misunderstanding of liberty. Liberty in America often refers to the right to do what I want. Liberty in Christ is not the right to do what I want, but the right to give up what I want. Paul describes it in Galatians 5:13: For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

But we also need to understand that liberty is NOT a freedom from the law of Christ, a common teaching of Protestant churches. Even in liberty in America, we acknowledge that law is the boundary of liberty. Christian liberty is also not a permission to “agree to disagree” on matters of faith and truth. Finally, liberty is about submission to one another, NOT submission of the congregation to one member.

Paul's teach is that we now have liberty. Regarding foods, Paul was reiterating what Jesus had said in Mark 7:19, that all foods are clean, as clean and unclean are passed. More generally, we have a liberty to engage the world (consider Acts 10). It is not a liberty to be of the world (Eph. 5:11), but to engage in appropriate manners. But liberty can only exist with knowledge. We (must) all have knowledge of what God expects, and be able to discern between what is faith and what is our own judgment (opinion). We also must have knowledge of one another's weaknesses, since this liberty makes us accountable to each other. We must do whatever we can to help each other be faithful and to avoid causing stumbling.

The applications of our liberty come in many ways. Celebrating holidays (mentioned in Romans 14) is one example. Making choices as to what business and restaurants we engage in business is another. We have the liberty to engage, but we must be mindful of our brethren and not cause them to stumble. In recent years issues related to the COVID epidemic (wearing masks, etc.) have become for many a test of liberty. We all should be prepared to make sacrifices for one another.

Romans 14:19 *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*