Growing in Grace, Growing in Community -- Life Lessons on Maturity with the Corinthians

***The Christian and Others: Learning vs. Loving*** 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Some find chapters 8-10 a little hard to follow, but if considered together, we see they are about one thing: Idolatry, in general, and in particular, whether or not to eat meat which had been sacrificed in pagan temples. In chapter eight, Paul explains that even though to a thoroughly knowledgeable believer, an idol is nothing, others (new Christians) have not quite processed that thought. What about them? Then, in chapter nine, Paul uses himself as an example. Even though as an apostle, he is “free” on many levels, he voluntarily gives up those rights for the gospel, so that people will be saved. Chapter ten ties it all together, warning the arrogant, assuring the weak, and giving practical examples which show that we must do all things, even mundane eating and drinking, to the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. He concludes the section in 11:1 with, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” It’s all back to Jesus.

❖ “Paul, we all have knowledge.” vv. 1-3

“But raw knowledge creates pride. Those who flaunt their knowledge miss the greater, intimate, knowledge of God and loving Him. When we love Him, it’s proof He knows us.”

❖ “But Paul, we know for sure that an idol is nothing!” vv. 4-7

“Actually, immature Christians do NOT know this, at least experientially. When they eat meat offered to idols, they make the old connections, and can find themselves worshiping the very gods that the mature believers know don’t exist! Their weaker conscience is defiled, and that can lead them right back into idolatry. We know there is only one God, true enough, but we are steeped in culture of many gods.”

❖ “But, Paul, (come on, now!), our diet has nothing to do with worship!” vv. 8-12

“That’s true in an absolute sense, we are not saved by our eating habits. But if someone who does not understand this sees you exercising your ‘freedom’ by eating in a pagan temple, and joins you without understanding why, his faith in the one true God is destroyed because he thinks you are worshiping there, and joins you! That’s a sin against your brother and therefore a sin against Jesus Himself.”

❖ “So I’d gladly give up meat altogether rather than destroy a brother’s faith.” v. 13

**Growth Principle #10: The spiritually mature Christian lives for others, even in the practical affairs of life.**

***1. What we know should not eclipse how we love.***

It’s possible to be so self-confident that we become unteachable. Notice that most of the Corinthians’ assumptions were true, still they were missing the point! Their pride of knowing had deadened their passion for others and the gospel. Are you as quick to share your heart as your knowledge? Have you become a life-long learner? 1 Corinthians 13

***2. What we do should not invalidate what we know.***

Our practice should not cancel our witness. Do you know you are being watched, and have an influence on others? Do you realize that when we selfishly sin against our brother we are sinning against our Savior? Do you see your church as God’s family, or just another social institution? Are your relationships with unbelievers for work and/or play, or do you view them as potentially redemptive? Do you see your children as those with weak consciences, or at least developing consciences, who are greatly influenced by what you do? Romans 14:13-23

***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***



1. What is the difference between a “weaker brother” and a legalist? Do we owe them the same things?

2. How do we apply these principles to our lives today? What issues might be parallel to “eating meat offered to idols”? How are people today led astray into idolatry? By means of other religions, atheism, or secularism, or all the above? How does it work?