

How to Keep From Wounding a Weaker Brother

1 Corinthians 8

Introduction:

1. Verse 1 introduces to us a subject that had become a major source of contention in the Corinthian church - eating meat offered to idols.
2. The church at Corinth was a mixture of two completely different groups.
 - There were Gentiles who had been saved out of a life of paganism and idolatry. They had worshipped at the pagan temple all their life. It's all they knew.
 - There were Jewish converts that had been saved out of the religion of Judaism. Their religion taught strict adherence to the Law of Moses.
3. **Acts 18:1-8** will help us to understand the diverse backgrounds of these two groups.
 - The Gentile converts were obviously continuing to do their grocery shopping at the pagan temple and continuing to eat meat that been offered to idols in idolatrous ceremonies.
 - The Jews (who abhorred idolatry) were blown away by this. They were aghast. They couldn't fathom such a thing. It went against every part of their moral conscience.
4. So we see the problem. What would be Paul's instructions concerning this matter. Does this have anything to do with us today? Absolutely! This chapter teaches the believer how to handle questionable, debatable, gray issues.
5. There can be things that one believer does in innocence that another believer has a serious problem with. Paul teaches that if these issues aren't handled wisely, fellow believers can be destroyed in their Christian walk.
6. Christian, your actions affect others. Paul teaches that you can wound a brother greatly, hinder him and destroy him through careless (not even sinful) actions.
7. How can we keep from wounding a weaker brother or sister in Christ?

First, we must utilize our knowledge with love.

1. Knowledge is a wonderful thing when it is guided by love. But when knowledge is divorced from love, it can be totally destructive. vs. 1
2. Verse 2 is a picture of an arrogant fool, someone who is a "know it all." He flaunts his supposed knowledge, but is cold and unloving. He can spout facts and tell you how you should think and act and why he is always right. Paul says that this guy doesn't really know anything as he ought to know.
3. There were people in the Corinthian church that had knowledge and understanding as to idols and gods. vs. 4-5
 - They knew there was one God and one Savior and that these idols and gods were of no consequence to the believer at all. They were totally irrelevant. vs. 6
4. But verse 7 is the key. Sometimes we forget that other believers are not where we are spiritually. They haven't grown in spiritual understanding. Their conscience has not been built up with sound doctrine, therefore it is very weak.
5. Paul was clear that as far as their relationship with God, it was a non-issue (vs. 8). But as far as their relationship with other believers in the church, it was a huge issue. vs. 7

- Possibly they were using this meat at church dinners or serving it in their homes to Jewish believers, and it was doing serious harm to these young Christians.
 - Defiled - to be made dirty or unclean
6. Christian, there are things that you **know** you can do, but love for the weaker brother will cause you to abstain from it. **1 Thessalonians 5:22**
 7. This is the lesson Paul is trying to teach these Corinthians. God's plan is not for you to simply have a head full of knowledge (puffeth up - inflate, blowing). God desires for your knowledge to be utilized with love and concern for your fellow brother. (**Philippians 2:4**) When you utilize knowledge without love you hurt and wound people.

Second, we must use our liberty with regard to others.

1. In verse 9 Paul gives some of the best advice you could ever receive.
2. When it comes to gray areas, you need to ask yourself, "Could this become a stumblingblock to a weaker brother or sister?"
 - Arrogance says, "There is nothing wrong with this. I have liberty to do this. I don't care who gets offended by it. It's not a sin."
 - Love says, "I have liberty to do this, but I will gladly refrain from it if it becomes a stumblingblock to a fellow believer."
3. Here is the reality: **people are watching you**. Verse 10 begins, "*For if any man see thee...*" It is not just about you and God. You are to consider others when it comes to your actions. **Romans 14:14-15, 19-21**
4. Your liberty in Christ is not to be used like a loose cannon, it is to be used in love with a servant's heart towards others. **Galatians 5:13-14**
5. When you use your liberty carelessly, younger Christians may follow your example, but their weak consciences are wounded. It becomes a major obstacle in their spiritual growth. You influence them to do things that wound their consciences. It eats them up inside and destroys them internally. vs. 10

Third, we must exercise our rights with responsibility.

1. Here is a thought you may have had when confronted with your actions by others: "There is nothing wrong with what I did, I don't care if it bothers them, it is their problem, not mine."
2. The answer to that is - **wrong!** When you do things that are a hindrance to weaker, immature Christians, you sin against them and against Christ Himself. vs. 11-12
3. When you destroy a fellow believer through careless words and actions, you are sinning against Christ. What you actually **did** may not have been a sin, but your lack of love and concern for a fellow believer makes it sinful.
4. Clearly Paul is teaching that we have a responsibility towards other believers. We are not islands to ourselves. We are part of a body that is fitly joined together.
5. How do I exercise my rights with responsibility? Look at verse 13. This is high ground, but it is the ground of grace and charity. Paul says, "You have liberty to eat the meat, but you have a compelling reason **not** to, for the good and edification of your brother."