A Weak Conscience
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8
Code: BQ61311

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. (1 Corinthians 8:4–7)

In verses 4–6 Paul states his agreement with the Corinthians who were theologically well taught. First he agrees **that there is no such thing as an idol in the world**. The stone, precious metal, or wood is real, but there is no god behind it. The image is not of anything that really exists. It only reflects the imagination of the one who designed it, or the impersonation of the demon who deceives through it (10:20).

Paul reminds them of an additional truth, one they must have known but that they did not take into consideration when exercising their Christian liberty. **However not all men have this knowledge**. Not all believers were mature in their knowledge and understanding of spiritual truths. Some were new Christians, freshly out of paganism and its many temptations and corruptions. They still imagined that idols, though evil, were real and that the gods the idols represented were real. They knew that there is only one *right* God but perhaps they had not yet fully grasped the truth that there is only one *real* God.

Even if they did understand that there was only one real God, the experiences of their past paganism were so fresh that they rejected all that was related to it. To participate in any way was to be tempted to fall back into former practices.

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. Some new converts wanted to take no chance of being contaminated again by the evil influences that for so long had governed everything they thought and did. The pagan gods were not real, but the wicked practices associated with them were real and fresh on their minds. They recoiled from having contact with anything associated with their past paganism. Their consciences were not yet strong enough to allow them to eat idol food without having it pull them back to their former idolatrous activity.

If such persons, following the example of more knowledgeable believers, go ahead and eat what their consciences tell them not to eat, **their conscience being weak is defiled**. Even though the act in itself is not morally or spiritually wrong, it becomes wrong when it is committed against conscience. A

defiled conscience is one that has been ignored and violated. Such a conscience brings confusion, resentment, and feelings of guilt. A person who violates his conscience willingly does what he thinks to be wrong. In his own mind he has committed sin; and until he fully understands that the act is not sin in God's eyes, he should have no part in it. "He who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Defiled conscience is defiled faith. Such behavior brings guilt feelings, despair, and loss of joy and peace. It may also lead to sinful thoughts connected with former pagan practices and even lead a person back into some of them.

Paul's primary point in the present passage is that anyone who causes such a weaker brother to defile his conscience and his faith helps lead that brother into sin. Knowledge may tell us that something is perfectly acceptable, but love will tell us that, because it is not acceptable to a fellow believer's conscience, we should not take advantage of our freedom.

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