

God's Wisdom in an Age of Confusion

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

WWJD?

Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to EBC, please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians...

WWJD Story

When I was a new Christian, I signed a contract that in every decision I would ask "WWJD?" I am not sure how long I lasted before I totally gave up. The phrase WWJD comes from a famous book by a pastor in the early 20th century named Charles Sheldon, who genuinely wanted his church to do this (admirable). However, the premise is rocky because we don't always know exactly what Jesus would have done in a given situation since we only have information about what He did in the Gospels, and most of those situations aren't ones that are immediately applicable to us.

However, that doesn't mean that the question is entirely irrelevant – in fact as we will see today in 1 Corinthians, Paul in fact wants us to consider what Jesus would do/say. But the foundation goes much deeper. Paul calls us not to simply try and answer a question but rather imitate a life.

The key text governing this whole section will be Paul's call to imitate Christ in 1 Cor. 11:1. But what does this mean?

Let's pray...

Background to Corinth: Review

Laying the Christ-exalting foundation for Christian identity and morals

The big challenge Paul faces is forming their identity. As I have tried to show you, IDENTITY INFORMS BEHAVIOR. As followers of Jesus, we are *people who have been given new desires for a new destiny: fellowship with Christ!*

We have seen how Paul warns the Corinthians to not go back to their former practices, particularly visiting the temple-cult prostitutes. However, while we are moving on to a new topic, we will see that the problems with the temple haven't quite ended yet. Over the next few weeks, the topic of what a Christian can and cannot (or should not) participate will be debated and discussed.

Which leads us to our text...

Exposition of 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Can we eat food in the temple that is offered to idols?

1 Cor. 8:1

First question: what is "food offered to idols" talking about?

The common practice in the ancient world was to eat food in a temple setting that has been sacrificed to other gods. This was a common thing for more wealthy patrons in society to do, where they would hold meetings, celebrations, etc. However, for those (presumably like the Corinthians) who were not as wealthy, to turn down such a meeting or participating in a gathering, was to lose social standing in a society where social standing was all you had. It was all about who you were connected to.

Second: what does it mean that everyone has "knowledge"?

As we will see, some Corinthians were arguing the point that since "we all know there are no true idols, it's okay to keep on going to these festivals, meetings, etc." However, Paul has a different response:

Knowledge puffs-up, but love builds up

1 Cor. 8:2-3

Notice what Paul does here – he says it's not about us knowing God, but God knowing us. The real question isn't "do you know God?" but rather "does God know you!" And here Paul clearly states that the way we know God, or become known by Him, is how we love. It's not what you know, or who you think you know, but who do you love. Note that Paul is not talking about doctrine here; he's talking about how we express our doctrine. Does it issue from a heart of love or something else?

Let's go on...

God is revealed through Christ ("crucified")

1 Cor. 8:4-6

Paul agrees that there are no other "gods", there is only the one God who comes to us in and through Jesus Christ. This will become important for us, because what has Paul already told us about the Jesus through whom all things exist?

He is Christ crucified, who destroys the knowledge of the lofty and reveals Himself in weakness to those who have faith.

Don't cause your brother to stumble.

1 Cor. 8:7-13

Okay, lots to unpack here. Again, some of these "wise" Corinthians are encouraging the "weaker" brothers to join them in their feasts and meetings in the Temple, assuring them that there are no idols, etc. However, these believers are still growing and weak, and in doing so are being led back into their idolatry.

This would be like inviting someone who struggles with alcohol to come join you in the pub for a few drinks because in Christ you are free and have overcome sin. That would not be good – why? Because you are causing them to sin, and you are harming one for whom Christ died. Furthermore, as we will see later in chapter 10, these apparently "strong brothers" are not as strong as they think (but we will get there in a couple of weeks).

But here, Paul says, that if eating meat in the Temple causes my brother to stumble, to fall back into sin, idolatry and the life from which Christ is seeking to redeem them, then he says, "I will never eat meat sacrificed to an idol again." Now, Paul is talking not about himself, but the attitude he wants them to adopt.

Now keep in mind that to not participate in these cultural activities would be a sacrifice – it would be a sacrifice of finances, social mobility, opportunity, etc. But Paul here says that the most important thing a mature Christian can do is to make sure that the less stable, less mature brother's/sister's faith is stable.

Now, again, there is a much deeper principle operating here that goes beyond WWJD...

Paul's ethical formula: Imitating Jesus by seeking the spiritual advantage of others over your own.

Here it is:

1 Cor. 10:31

How do I glorify God in my eating/drinking? This way...

1 Cor. 10:32

Giving no offense, no opportunity for anyone to be scandalized or anyone's faith to be damaged or anything that would bring the gospel into some kind of disrepute.

1 Cor. 10:33

And here is the great motive by which Paul evaluates his cultural decision making: that they may be saved!

1 Cor. 11:1

Imitating Christ means putting others ahead of yourself by prioritizing their spiritual needs as more significant than your own.

Main Idea:

Imitating Christ means putting others ahead of yourself by prioritizing their spiritual needs as more significant than your own.

Application: How do I know the difference between being “true to myself” (spiritual selfishness) and imitating Christ (spiritual selflessness)?

The biggest challenge we face in our culture is “spiritual selfishness” which says, *as long as I am being true to myself, it doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks.*

“If it works for me, edifies me, helps me, then it doesn’t matter what others think, I’m just going to be true to myself.”

Now, let's be careful here. Most of the time, the people who champion themselves as being true to themselves are simply masking their own spiritual selfishness with pious language.

So, how do you know the difference?

When thinking through cultural activities, here are some discerning questions to ask:

Does it glorify, build, and save?

Will this glorify God and exalt Christ?

Will this help build/strengthen the faith of other believers?

Will this help unbelievers better understand and/or know the saving reality of Jesus Christ?

Let this be your rule...

Paul’s whole ministry as a project of bringing others into the joy that he had in knowing Jesus Christ. This is, in fact, the way Paul understood love—bringing people into his joy in God, no matter what it cost him. Love means gladly embracing the quest to bring others into your experience of joy in God, even if it costs you your life. – John Piper

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why is eating meat sacrificed in temples such a big deal?
- 2) How does Paul describe Jesus to the Corinthians? (hint: see 1 Cor. 8:4; Deut. 6:4)
- 3) What principle(s) does Paul want the Corinthians to govern their behavior by? (hint: see 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1)
- 4) Is there any area of your life that might be causing others to stumble? What is one way you are consciously trying to point others to Jesus?