

In 1 Cor. 8-10, Paul works on an elaborate compromise between two factions in the Corinthian church. The more educated and socially elite group, who unlike the poor ate meat regularly and not just when it was doled out at pagan festivals, had well-to-do friends who would serve meat, they probably represented the liberal faction, who considered themselves “strong” and the socially lower group “weak.” According to Paul, what do the ‘mature’ Christians know and understand about food sacrificed to idols?

What warning does Paul give about this kind of knowledge?
Explain!

What does Paul say is more important than exercising the freedom that comes from knowledge?

What are some contemporary equivalents of food sacrificed to idols?

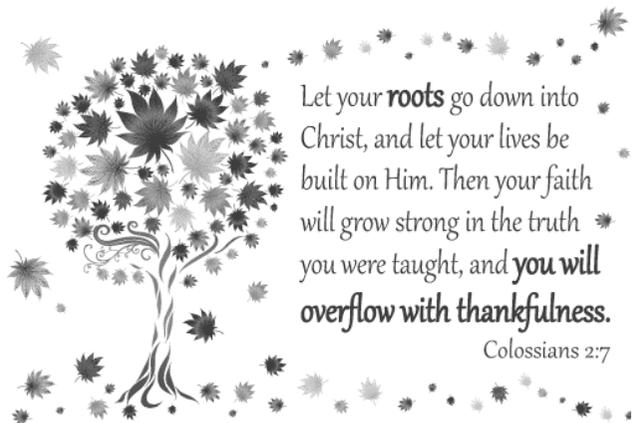
What are the issues that divide the church today which might revolve around different perspectives e.g. sexuality?

In what situations today might our "knowledge" and freedom “destroy a weaker brother”?

The eating of meat was a real issue for first century Christians and Paul’s guidance was to encourage those with differing perspectives and understandings to try and see the other person’s point of view.

To what extent should we compromise on what we believe to be true, so as to not prejudice a fellow believer’s faith?

How can we reconcile our differences in Christ?



Growing Together I

Once upon a time one of the great get out statements was:

"I can be a Christian without going to Church?"

Today this is rarely heard as an attempt to justify one's behaviour, as people no longer feel they need to explain themselves

but how would you respond to such a claim?

Saying something is true doesn't make it so!



This study has been put together in the belief that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian. Even the early hermits and the Desert Fathers who went into the wilderness to be alone with God saw themselves as representing humanity. They believed that their meeting with the Divine would help them relate in a better way to the world and its people.

When Jesus was asked to prioritise the Jewish Law, he responded to the question:

"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.' ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."
Mk 12:28-31 NIV

The Christian Faith is about relationships – our relationship with God and the way we interact with each other. As previous studies have explored we can confront and meet Christ in our dealings with those around us, so there is a real sense in that we have to think carefully about the way we treat and think about those around us – and as the parable of the Good Samaritan makes plain – our neighbour isn't necessarily the person who lives next door!

This well known parable has an introduction where the summary of the law is on the lips of the lawyer who comes to question Jesus and Luke implies he tries to catch him out:

A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. v.25 GNB

READ: LUKE 10: 25-41

What truths do you think Jesus was trying to teach through this story?

Do you appreciate how scandalous it would have been to have made the Samaritan the hero?

How should this story influence the way we treat others? What difference might it make to our behaviour if any?



NOTE The suggestion is that when asked which one was a neighbour the lawyer could not bring himself to say the Samaritan!



What we sometimes forget to notice is that the story that follows this incident is about the two sisters: Martha and Mary and where giving practical help is not considered a priority!

Why do you think Luke brings these two incidents together?

What point(s) do you think Jesus is trying to make to the two sisters?

How can we best maintain the balance between our devotional lives and our

social concern as Christians – between what we believe and what we do about it?

When St Paul wrote his letters to the emerging churches in Asia Minor and beyond, he was trying to help those first Christians understand what was involved in giving their allegiance to Jesus Christ. There was no handbook about the Christian faith – there were the Old Testament scriptures as inspiration and providing a pattern as to what the Lord God had done in the past. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, those early churches were challenged to learn to live and work and worship together in their contemporary situations

Paul wanted them to realize that certain forms of behaviour were appropriate and others not! But one of his constant themes was the need for them to work together and strive for unity on Christ, to support and uphold each other and to appreciate those who found it difficult to live out this new life.

READ 1CORINTHIANS 8

It was not easy to avoid meat sacrificed to idols in Corinth. For one thing, nearly all dinner parties, trade associations, and other social occasions included some dedication to the patron deity of the gathering. Many parties and meetings were actually held in temples. Furthermore, nearly all butchers (except Jewish ones) sold sacrificed meat; many shops were even attached to temples. When an animal was offered in a temple, a small portion was burnt for the god, the worshipers got some (they usually ate it right there in a dinner party), and the priests got the rest. What the priests couldn't use they sold to the butchers. Since only the best animals could be offered to the gods, the best meat was more than likely from a sacrifice. So, in order to avoid idol meat, one would have to shop only at Jewish butchers (or Christian ones if there were any) and never attend any social occasions with pagans. For anyone whose livelihood depended in part on business dinners or trade association meetings, this was out of the question. For anyone who cared about his social standing, it was absurd.

Some of the Corinthian Christians reasoned that since the idols were not real gods, there was no reason to sabotage their businesses, their social standing, and their diets. These enlightened ones may have been the more wealthy and educated who were used to eating meat daily in ordinary, nonreligious situations. *Knowledge* was one of their great values.



However, others found it difficult to shake the idea that the idols they had been worshiping all their lives were not real, powerful entities who somehow contaminated the meat offered to them. Among this group were probably the poorer members of the church, whose daily diet was vegetarian and who normally saw meat only in temple feasts. For them, the association between meat and idolatry was strong.

There was one other factor in this debate. In the Jerusalem decree (*Acts 15:29*), the apostles had all agreed that the Gentiles need not be circumcised but must avoid sexual immorality and food sacrificed to idols. Paul did not mention this decree (to which he had agreed only a few years earlier) in his letter to Corinth, but some members of the church may have been trying to enforce it.