

# That Which is Lacking

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*1 Corinthians 8:7:13*

## I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Where I grew up, there is each October a huge festival known as “Court Days.”
1. “Court Days” is something you would just have to see to believe—150,000 folks or so in a town a little smaller than South Charleston buying everything from food to knives to guns to sweatshirts to whatever else you’d want. Anyway, growing up, my family would spend all day Saturday browsing the selections, and we boys got so much money every year that we could spend on whatever we wanted.
  2. For several years when I was in elementary school one man would bring a dancing monkey.
    - a. He played music on an accordian, and the monkey, if you would hold up some change, would come and get the money out of you palm.
      - 1) My brother Kyle, being about 4, absolutely loved that monkey. He never wanted to do anything but watch that monkey dance.
      - 2) One day Kyle was begging Mom & Dad to take him to see the monkey. They, like all parents before and since, kept telling him, “Later.”
    - b. We went in to an old store, all three of us kids holding hands with either Mom or Dad, and did some shopping and came out to go to another. Mom & Dad were looking at something when they wanted to show Kyle what they had found, but Kyle was nowhere to be found.
    - c. Mom & Dad were obviously terrified.
      - 1) Dad sent Mom, my other brother and me, to the headquarters the State Police had established for such purposes.
      - 2) He went to look for Kyle. Once Mom, Aaron, & I arrived at the State Police posts, the officers obviously questioned Mom extensively about what Kyle looked like and what he was wearing.
      - 3) They then, as I recall, took us to a separate room where they kept us as comfortable as possible. Dad was walking and found a lady holding Kyle not far from the last place we had seen the monkey.
- B. There cannot possibly be a more terrifying feeling in the world than not knowing where your child is. I know as the oldest brother I was mortified when we couldn’t find Kyle.
1. Honestly, because I was no more than 7 or 8 at the time, I can’t remember many of the details of that time Kyle slipped away from Mom & Dad, but I do recall the sick feeling I had in my gut.
    - a. Can you imagine the horror in New York after the terrorist attacks of 2001—not knowing if a loved one was dead or alive and searching intently for any hope of survival?
    - b. Can you imagine the terror in Southeast Asia after the devastating tsunami and looking for loved ones who might have been washed out to sea?
    - c. Can you think of anything more terrifying than lacking someone you love so dearly?
  2. This text is not about missing people, but it is about missing important qualities in Christianity. Both groups in Corinth—the weak and the strong—were missing/lacking important attributes. Paul even goes so far as to pledge to miss something important. What is lacking? A LACK OF COMPREHENSION, A LACK OF COMPASSION, & A LACK OF CUISINE.

## II. LACK OF COMPREHENSION, vv. 8-9.

- A. One of the problems in the Corinthian congregation was that not everyone understood that eating meat originally offered to idols wasn't really a big deal.
1. Paul writes: "Not all possess this knowledge," v. 8. The "this knowledge" refers specifically to the comprehension that a Christian could eat meat offered to idols.
  2. As far as I can tell, the NT never condemns the eating of food offered to idols PROVIDED that (a) I did not eat as part of idolatrous worship and (b) I did not cause another brother to defile his conscience.
- B. Yet, not everyone in Corinth understood that "but some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol."
1. The KJV reads: "some with conscience of the idol unto this hour."
    - a. The word translated "former association" in the ESV and "conscience" in the KJV refers to custom or acquaintance. It doesn't refer to "conscience" in the way we typically think of that term.
    - b. What Paul is saying is this: "Look, some of your fellow brethren are troubled by your eating food offered to idols because that's how they used to worship." These weak brethren were eating food as really offered to an idol; in other words, they could not separate the act of eating with friends in a pagan temple and the worship in which they used to participate there.
  2. Because these brethren could not enter the dining room of a pagan temple and eat a slab of meat as nothing more than a slab of meat their conscience, because it was weak, was defiled.
    - a. These brethren were sinning in defiling their conscience. We understand, do we not, that we dare not defile our conscience?
    - b. In another passage concerning eating food offered to idols, Paul writes, "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rm 14:22-23).
- C. Paul agrees with the knowledge of the strong and writes: "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do."
1. What I eat is not going to make me right before God. Perhaps the strong were saying, "Folks, what I eat has nothing to do with how spiritual or unspiritual I am. What I eat is a moot point."
  2. They were right—eating is totally irrelevant to my spiritual well-being—"It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person" (Mt 15:11).
  3. The Corinthians were no better off if they did eat meat sacrificed to idols and no worse off if they did not—Paul reemphasizes again that meat has no bearing on our spirituality.
- D. What does this have to do with us?
1. We dare not be content to be weak in the faith.
    - a. The problem of eating meat sacrificed to idols had two causes—(1) Some of the brethren did not understand that eating meat sacrificed to idols made no difference & (2) The brethren who did understand they could properly eat meat offered to idols had a bad attitude about doing so.
    - b. If all the Corinthians understood that eating meat offered to idols had no bearing on spirituality, we wouldn't be reading this text.
  2. Are we weak or strong in the faith?
    - a. "Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity" (Heb 6:1-2). The author says, "Don't stay with the fundamentals of the faith, but go on to maturity."

- b. Are we going on to maturity? Do we have four or five favorite topics we continually study or want preached about, or are we seeking to know all that God has to say? Do we want to be challenged to grow in the faith, or are we content to be the way we've always been?
- E. We can't be convinced something is wrong simply because we associate it with error.
  - 1. In other words, simply because a denomination does something doesn't necessarily make it wrong.
  - 2. Now, don't get me wrong: if something is forbidden in the Scriptures, we cannot adopt it—period!
    - a. Let me give an example: Sunday schools used to be a very divisive innovation among churches of Christ. The Sunday school, as we know it, began among denominational groups in the 1700's, and expanded to America in the 1800's. Notice what was written in the Gospel Advocate, one of the most respected and solid publications in our brotherhood, in 1910: "Whenever any man proves the Sunday school to be of divine authority, he can prove missionary societies to be of divine authority. By all rules of logic, he that 'would the one retain, must to the other cling.' I emphatically deny that there is any divine authority for Sunday schools, either by precept or precedent, hint or allusion . . . In all the writings of the New Testament there is not one word that even squints in that direction."
    - b. Some of the Corinthians were saying, "We used to do this before we came to Christ; therefore, it must be wrong." Let us not be in that number!

### III. A LACK OF COMPASSION, vv. 9-12.

- A. The Corinthians needed to make sure that their right of eating meat offered to idols did not become a stumbling block to the weak.
  - 1. How odd those words sound in our modern culture!
    - a. How many times do we hear someone say, "I have the right to do this or the right to say that. I don't care if you're offended or not"?
    - b. We live in a society which values its "rights" and is not going to give them up for anyone.
  - 2. Paul doesn't declare that these Christians did not have the right to eat meat sacrificed to idols—they did. They needed to be cautious, however, that their right did not become a stumbling block for the weak.
    - a. We often read this text to refer to offending someone. We think, "If I do this and so-and-so is slightly offended, because so-and-so doesn't like it, I have to stop it."
    - b. This text has nothing to do with offending someone's sensibilities.
      - 1) If it did, could we really do anything? How do I know if what I'm going to do is offensive to you?
      - 2) The word "stumbling block" in this text means to lead someone to sin.
- B. How can my eating meat offered to idols lead someone to sin? If someone sees me eating meat offered to an idol, if his conscience is weak, he will be emboldened to eat food offered to idols.
  - 1. Here's what Paul means: If your conscience dictates that it's wrong to eat food sacrificed to idols and you see me going into a temple to eat, you will be encouraged to defile your conscience.
  - 2. In the original context, Paul likely uses a very sarcastic pun.
    - a. I can't say this with a 100% certainty, but it seems quite likely that strong in Corinth were saying that the weak needed to be built up in the faith.
    - b. Paul uses the word for "build up" here, but he says that the weak are being built up to sin.

- C. The strong were using their knowledge and thus destroying the weak, the brother for whom Christ had died.
1. Instead of just going to eat a nice meal in a pagan temple, the strong were destroying their brethren.
  2. Jesus had given his life to for these brethren to save them from sin, and the strong were causing these precious children of God to sin.
- D. Sinning against brethren when their conscience is weak is sin against Christ.
- E. What should you and I do with this text?
1. We need to be careful how we use our freedom in Christ.
    - a. There is no doubt but that we have freedom in Christ.
      - 1) In the next chapter, Paul expounds on his rights and how he is careful when using them. To begin that section, the apostle asks the rhetorical question, “Am I not free?” (1 Cor 9:1).
      - 2) When Paul was in Jerusalem, false brethren “slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus” (Gal 2:4).
      - 3) When Thomas Campbell arrived in the United States from Scotland, he was severely chastised by the Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania for not following certain doctrines of that body.
        - a) On August 17, 1809, he and other denominational clergy founded the Christian Association of Washington, Pennsylvania, in part, to determine what to do when they disagreed with denominational doctrine.
        - b) Campbell was chosen to write a document which would help guide that organization.
        - c) The document became known as The Declaration and Address. While it is not at all Gospel, Campbell well summarized Christian liberty when he wrote, “Resume that precious, that dear bought liberty, wherewith Christ has made his people free; a liberty from subjection to any authority but his own, in matters of religion.”
    - b. While no man has a right to tell me what to do religiously, only the Lord has that right, we need to be careful that we don’t cause others to sin in our liberty. Let me give you a “real life” example.
      - 1) When I was the youth minister at a church in KY, we decided to begin having a longer worship period on Sunday morning & to have Bible classes on Sunday night.
        - a) The elders decided that this would better meet the needs of the congregation: we could have more time for praise, worship, & study when we assembled on Sunday mornings & we could have more time for Sunday school on Sunday night.
        - b) At any rate, the elders bumped into a family in a supermarket the week after we started this, and the lady said, “We’re not coming back. We’re staying away from the church because what you’re doing isn’t right.”
      - 2) The elders wisely decided to discontinue our practice.
        - a) I understand that’s not a perfect parallel as to what was taking place in Corinth.
        - b) But:
          - Not one word of Scripture condemned what we were doing, but someone was going to sin if we continued in that liberty.
          - Therefore, we stopped the practice.
    - c. We stopped the practice, for causing one to sin is a serious offense against Christ.
      - 1) “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (Mt 18:6).

- 2) In causing a brother to sin, we sin against Christ, for Jesus identifies with his people. To harm a child of God is to harm Christ.
  - a) At the Great Judgment scene of Mt 25, Jesus makes clear that he identifies with his people. He praises those who care for the downtrodden by saying: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (v. 40).
  - b) In persecuting the church, Saul of Tarsus was persecuting Jesus himself: Jesus says to Saul, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5).
2. We need to see all of our brethren, not just those who think and act like us, as those for whom Christ died.
  - a. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. Yet, there are texts which remind us that he died in a special for the church.
    - 1) Paul told the Ephesian elders: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).
    - 2) In John’s vision of heaven, he saw four living creatures and twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and praise him, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rv 5:9).
  - b. Jesus blood is available for every person on this earth; however, for those of us who have met that blood through baptism, that blood has done its work and cleansed us from sin. Therefore, how can I treat my brethren lightly?
    - 1) How can I do something, knowing it’s likely to cause another brother to sin, and not care?
    - 2) Why would I want to cause my brethren for whom Jesus gave his precious blood to sin by defiling their conscience?
- F. The strong in Corinth had little or no compassion for the weak. How strong is our compassion toward our brothers?

#### IV. A LACK OF CUISINE, v. 13.

- A. Because food offered to idols was causing a problem in Corinth, Paul declares, “If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”
- B. It seems so odd to our ears to hear Paul declare that he will never eat meat.
  1. In fact, his declaration is much stronger than either the ESV or NIV render it. Paul writes, quite similar to how the KJV translates the phrase, that he shall not eat meat forever if his brother sins because of it.
  2. Why not just stay away from the temple and buy meat at the marketplace?
    - a. Even meat sold in the market was often leftovers from a pagan sacrifice.
    - b. In some cities with sizeable Jewish populations, the Jews had their own separate market with meat which was both kosher and never used in sacrifice. I am unaware, however, whether or not archeologists have found any evidence of such a market in Corinth.
- C. Paul says that he is willing to give up meat if it means keeping a brother from stumbling.
  1. What I find interesting about this text is that meat has always been a sign of wealth.
    - a. Economists tell us that as people move up the socio-economic ladder, one of the first things to change is their meat consumption.
    - b. You probably doubt that’s the case.
      - 1) But, which is cheaper: vegetables or meat?
      - 2) If you have to tighten your belt at the grocery store, which are you more likely to buy: bacon or filet mignon?

2. Even for us, meat is a sign of wealth, and Paul says he'll give up that right to keep brethren from falling into sin.
  - a. What will you give up to keep your brethren from falling into sin?
  - b. What will you give up to come to Jesus? We know that we must give up ourselves to come to him? Will you give yourself up to him this very day?