

GET WISDOM!

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THE ORTHODOX BIBLE STUDY PROGRAM FOR TEENS



The purpose of this chapter is to go beyond the issue of meat offered to idols, and instead to look at the principles underlying the issue. He begins by discussing knowledge: Christians have knowledge in varying degrees and amounts - in this case, knowledge regarding prohibitions against idolatry, as well as the practice of offering meat to idols - but we must be careful to avoid being prideful and judgmental in our knowledge. Ultimately, it is more important - and more edifying - to be loving (8:1), because the person who knows a great deal, but becomes prideful in his or her knowledge, shows that they lack the essential knowledge about being loving (8:2). In the end, the most important thing to know about God is that we should love Him and be loved by Him (8:3).

Among the things a Christian knows is that idols are merely false gods, and that our God is the only true God (8:4; cf. Deuteronomy 32:17, 21). St. Paul clarifies this point: even if there are other so-called gods, we worship God the Father, the source of all life, and the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things exist (8:5-6; cf. Acts 17:28). St. Cyril of Alexandria similarly says, "Just as there is one God the Father from whom all things are, so there is one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things."

Despite this truth, St. Paul notes that there are some Christians who, believing that idols have some spiritual power, are made uneasy by eating food that was offered to these gods. Therefore, because their conscience bothers them when eating meat that was offered to an idol, they are

"defiled" by the process (8:7). In reality, this food is neither spiritually beneficial or detrimental (8:8), but Christians must nonetheless be considerate of those whose faith is weaker and thus are bothered by consuming this food (8:9,10). This point is very serious: if the spiritually weaker Christian violates his or her conscience by eating meat offered to idols, then that person has sinned (St. Paul even

EPISODE 10

I CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 8

warns that this process could ultimately lead to the person spiritually perishing) (8:10). Furthermore, if in the liberty accorded to them by their knowledge the more spiritually mature person causes a spiritually weaker person to violate his conscience, then the spiritually mature person has also sinned against Christ (8:12).

In the end, St. Paul concludes, he would completely abstain from eating any meat if he knew that by doing so he would be assisting a spiritually weaker brother or sister in Christ (8:13).

I-WILL-DO-THIS-TODAY...

St. John Cassian, in discussing the work of a spiritual director, notes an important fact that is relevant for all Christians when dealing with weaker individuals: a discerning individual can help another person to "walk the royal road," avoiding both extreme self-control and indifference and laxity regarding spiritual disciplines and the spiritual life.

When you are a mature Christian who has a solid relationship with another Christian, you realize that there is no "one size fits all" approach to dealing with the spiritual life of a person. As St. Gregory says,

The same medicine is not in every case administered to men's bodies. A difference is made according to their degree of health or infirmity. So also are souls treated with varying instruction and guidance. Some are lead by doctrine, others trained by example. Some need the spur, others the curb. Some are sluggish and hard to rouse to the good and must be stirred up by being smitten with the Word. Others are immoderately fervent in spirit, with impulses difficult to restrain, like thoroughbred colts who run wide of the turning post - to improve them, the Word must have a restraining and checking influence.



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