

# idol threat

## 1 Corinthians 8

Whether or not you eat food that's been offered to idols is hardly a pressing issue for Australian Christians today - unless, of course, you have qualms about the statues of Buddha in your local Chinese restaurant. For the Corinthians, though, it was a genuine dilemma. Animals offered in sacrifice at the idol temple were butchered and sold in the market place - if you wanted to enjoy a steak dinner, there's every possibility that your meat had been offered to an idol earlier that day. Some Christians had qualms about this. Others didn't. Ultimately, this chapter is relevant because it tells us something about how we should be dealing with disagreements, rather than meat products.

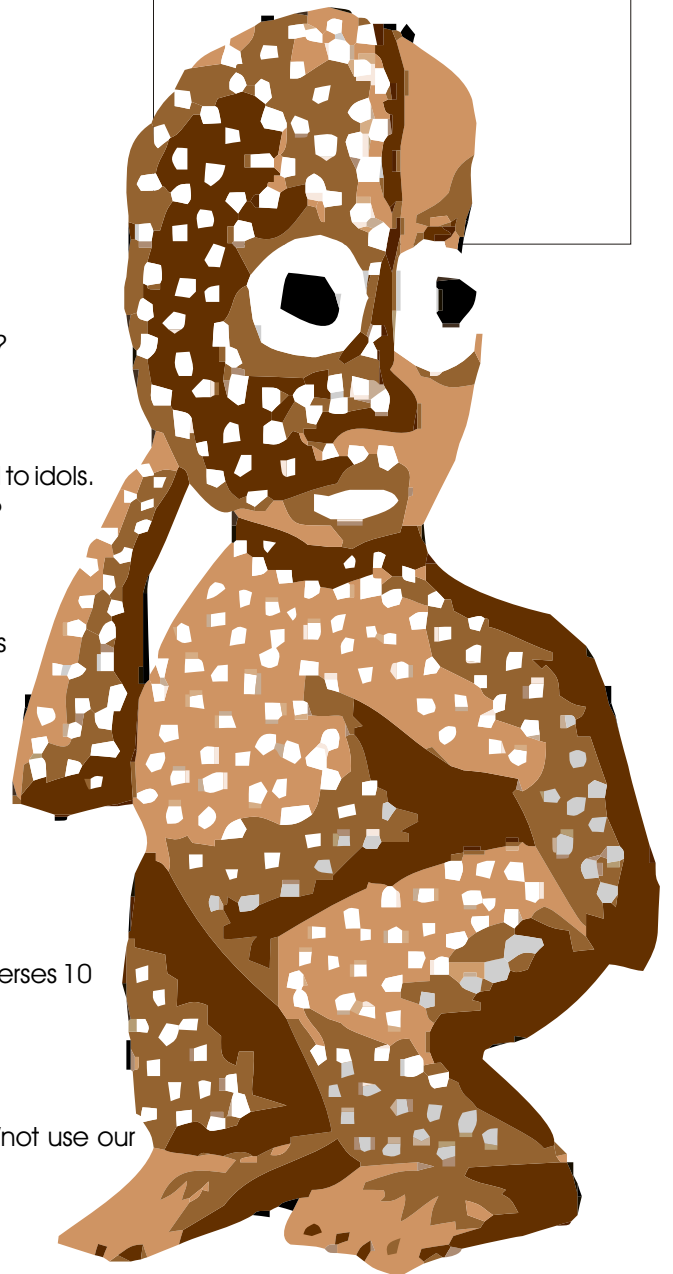
Can you think of issues like the "meat question" that cause concern and confusion for Christians today?

### Background Briefing

Read Acts 15:1-29. This important council of the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem decided that Gentile Christians (non-jews) should not be brought under Israel's Old Testament Law. Interestingly, though, there were two key areas the Gentiles were told to watch carefully. Acts 15:19-21 spells them out. The Corinthians seem to need correction in both of these issues.

### Read 1 Corinthians 8.

1. What *two things* does Paul contrast in verses 1-3?
2. What does he say is the danger of knowledge *without love*?
3. In verses 4-6 Paul considers the question of food sacrificed to idols. He says that our knowledge tells us *it's OK* to eat it. Why is it OK?
4. But according to verse 7-8, does *everyone* have this knowledge? Why not?
5. Why does this mean it's *not* OK to eat in an idol's temple? (verses 9-12)
6. How is your definition of sin challenged and redefined by verses 10 and 11? According to these verses, what is sin?
7. What principle does Paul give in verse 13 for how to use/not use our freedom? What's his main concern?



According to what we've just seen, it's not always OK to do what's OK. And "sin" is not just a simple matter of making up a list of rules about what's right and what's wrong. Even more challenging, you can't even say, "that's just between me and God."

8. How is limiting our freedom for the sake of others being like Jesus (verse 11)?

9. Apparently, Paul would rather never eat steak again than cause problems for a Christian brother or sister. What key verse does this bring to mind back in 1 Corinthians 6?

10. Can you think of any examples of how we should be careful in the use of our freedom out of love for others?

**Pick up Paul's further comments on eating meat offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 10 by reading 10:23-11:1.**

11. Is it okay for the Corinthians to eat the meat from the meat market, or not?

12. What questions should a Christian ask before they exercise their "freedom"?

13. So what's the practical conclusion? According to Jewish law, it was required to investigate whether any meat they bought had been sacrificed to idols. In contrast, what are the (gentile?) Christians to do?

### **Something to chew on**

Verses 25 to 27 spell out two circumstances where Christians were simply not to ask questions of conscience. What they don't know won't hurt them. Verse 28 is more complex. Clearly, there's a circumstance where you're wiser not to eat. But Paul's reasoning is complex. Whose conscience is at stake? How and why? Can you untangle his logic?

### **Conclusion**

**Read again Paul's conclusion in verses 31 to 33.**

a. What is Paul's overwhelming motive? (Do you think verses 31 and 32-33 converge in Paul's thinking?)

b. Whose "stumbling" is Paul concerned for? Why? (What does "stumble" mean here?)

c. How much of his freedom is Paul prepared to put aside for the sake of seeing people saved?

d. Where did Paul get the idea of putting aside his own freedom for the sake of others? Why is it hard to follow his example in this? (11:1)

Are there ways in which you're trying to modify your preferences for the sake of seeing others saved?

Are there people you could "connect" with by being more interested in what they're interested in?

Are there freedoms that you insist on that are off-putting to others?

Look back through this study. What practical issues are raised that require a response from you?

**Background**  
In Paul's mind, there is a difference between joining in the idol feasts at the temple (ch 8) and buying meat at the temple market. Clearly, the issue is not in the meat itself...

