

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT FALSE GUILT

1 Cor. 8; Rom. 14:20-23

INTRODUCTION

When personally acquired standards are not moral issues, but are instead, in the gray area of Christian liberty, he is responsible to God to obey his conscience concerning them, until such a time as he can, with the approval of his conscience, by faith enjoy his Christian freedom in those areas. If one violates any of his own personally acquired standards, he is sinning against God, and his conscience rightly judges him guilty. Some call this false guilt, but is there really such a thing?

THIS WEEK:

This week, our study is going to explore how the conscience operates in relation to the gray areas of the Christian life. Is there a biblical basis for so called "false guilt"?

OBSERVATION *What does it SAY?*

Discover key details of the passages by answering the following questions:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 8. What attitude does the Apostle Paul encourage Christians, who see no issue with eating food offered to idols, to adopt towards those other Christians who believe it's wrong? Why?
2. What term does Paul employ to describe the state of a "weak" person's conscience when they eat food sacrificed to idols against their own convictions (1 Cor. 8:7)?
3. What word is used to describe the condition of a person who succumbs to the pressure to eat food offered to idols when it is against their conscience (1 Cor. 8:11)?
4. Read Romans 14:15, 20-23. What terms does Paul use to describe a person's standing with God when they eat against their conscience? (v. 23)?

INTERPRETATION *What does it MEAN?*

Use the Bible to interpret the Bible. Look up the cross references and use them to interpret the passage under study:

5. False guilt has been defined by its proponents as “feeling guilt for something that God and His Word in no way condemns”.¹ 1 Cor 8:7-13 is often presented as an example of this false guilt. In what ways does your answers to questions 2, 3, and 4 above prove that these verses are in fact an instance of true guilt before God?
6. In what ways does Rom. 14:14, 23 teach that one is morally responsible to God for his choices regarding even the non-biblical, non-moral standards he has adopted in his heart?
7. Why do you suppose that God holds one accountable for violating their conscience even though the specific convictions they hold are not prohibited in the Bible (James 4:17)?
8. What is the result to one’s faith when they violate their conscience (1 Tim. 1:18-19)?

APPLICATION *Why does it MATTER?*

Now that you have discerned what the passage means, how does it apply to your life?

The fact that failing to keep one’s personal scruples and convictions contributes to a sense of guilt, fear, and fleeing of God’s presence (troubled conscience) is a watershed moment for some who struggle with depression. People do not naturally associate the depression and unhappiness they experience day-to-day with a failure to abide by their own personal mores and convictions.

9. List some non-moral or non-biblical convictions that people hold that you think could be a source of guilt:
10. What personal convictions do you have to manage before God in order to have a clear conscience?

¹Frank Minirth and Paul Meier. *Happiness is a Choice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 70.

Believers are required at all times to keep an *unguilty* conscience before God—including guilt from not keeping one's own personal convictions. All guilt is against God and it keeps one from open expressions of agape love towards God and others. That is another reason why there is no such thing as false guilt.

11. What dangers lurk in believing that real guilt is false guilt?

12. What objective commands of Scripture has our culture redefined as a-moral or non-moral? What are the consequences to our culture of that shift?

TAKE AWAY *How does this change me?*

13. What does this passage reveal about God?

14. What does this passage reveal about humanity?

15. What is the Holy Spirit revealing in this passage about your life?

Have your kids do the word find puzzle on the next page or read to them 1 Cor. 8 Use the following questions to have a discussion about how God knows our secret desires and actions.

1. What does Paul say about eating food that has been offered to idols?

Suggested Answer: Paul says that we know idols are not real gods and that eating food offered to them is not important. But, he also says that not everyone knows this, and we should be careful not to hurt others' faith.

2. How does Paul describe the difference in knowledge between people?

Suggested Answer: Paul says that some people know that idols are not real, but others might still think they are. This difference in understanding can cause problems if we are not considerate.

3. What does Paul say is more important than knowledge?

Suggested Answer: Paul says that love is more important than knowledge. It's better to care about others and how they feel.

4. How does Matthew 22:37-39 help us understand why Paul says love is more important than knowledge in 1 Corinthians 8?

Suggested Answer: In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus says the most important commandments are to love God and love your neighbor. This helps us see why Paul says love is more important, because loving others is what Jesus taught us to do.

5. How does Romans 14:13-15 relate to Paul's message about being careful with others' faith in 1 Corinthians 8?

Suggested Answer: Romans 14:13-15 talks about not doing things that might make other people stumble in their faith. This is similar to Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 8 about being careful not to hurt others' faith with our actions.

6. How can 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 help us understand what Paul means about not using our freedom to hurt others?

Suggested Answer: In 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, Paul says that not everything that is okay to do is good for others. This helps us understand that even if we are free to eat certain foods, we should think about how it affects other people.

7. What can you do to make sure your actions don't hurt your friends' feelings or faith?

Suggested Answer: I can think about how my actions might make my friends feel and choose to do things that help and encourage them, instead of doing things that might upset them.

8. How can you show love to others when you know something they don't?

Suggested Answer: I can be patient and kind, explain things gently, and not make them feel bad for not knowing. It's important to help them understand without making them feel small.

9. What are some ways you can put others' needs before your own, like Paul suggests?

Suggested Answer: I can share my toys, help my friends when they need it, and listen to their problems. I can also choose to do things that make them happy, even if it means I don't get to do what I want all the time.

WORD FIND

1 Cor 8

S O O T W E A K N C
A G F H M A N Y E O
C F O E K N O W U N
R A O R I D O L R S
I L D E E C B O X C
F L A X D A R R E I
I O N I N U O D G E
C V Y S I S T E R N
E E O T U E H U R C
D K N O W L E D G E
H U E H C H R I S T

Now about **food sacrificed** to **idols**: We **know** that “we all have **knowledge**.” **Knowledge** puffs up, but **love** builds up. If **anyone** thinks he **knows** anything, he does not yet **know** it as he ought to **know** it. But if **anyone loves** God, he is known by him. About eating **food sacrificed** to **idols**, then, we **know** that “an **idol** is nothing in the world,” and that “**there** is no God but one.” For even if **there** are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth—as **there** are **many** “gods” and **many** “**lords**”—yet for us **there** is one God, the Father. All things are from him, and we **exist** for him. And **there** is one **Lord**, Jesus **Christ**. All things are through him, and we **exist** through him. However, not everyone has this **knowledge**. Some have been so used to idolatry up until now that when they eat **food sacrificed** to an **idol**, their **conscience**, being **weak**, is defiled. **Food** will not bring us close to God. We are not worse off if we don’t eat, and we are not better if we do eat. But be careful that this right of yours in no way becomes a stumbling block to the **weak**. For if someone sees you, the one who has **knowledge**, dining in an **idol’s** temple, won’t his **weak conscience** be encouraged to eat **food** offered to **idols**? So the **weak** person, the **brother** or **sister** for whom **Christ** died, is ruined by your **knowledge**. Now when you sin like this against **brothers** and **sisters** and wound their weak conscience, you are sinning against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food causes my brother or sister to fall, I will never again eat meat, so that I won’t cause my brother or sister to fall.