

## 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 NIV

### What's the condition of your conscience?

**“Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.**

**Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.**

**2) The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. 3) But the man who loves God is known by God.**

**“4) So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. 5) For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many 'lords'), 6) yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.**

**“7) But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as**

**having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. 8) But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.**

**“9) Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 10) For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?**

**“11) So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. 12) When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.**

**13) Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.**

**12) When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”**

**Not long ago I told a friend how difficult it was for Norma and me to make ends meet for the first several years we were married.**

We scrimped, scrounged, and carefully managed what little we had.

**My friend seemed amazed, saying, “Bob, I always thought that you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth.”**

**When I was born, the spoon was a cheap cardboard imitation.**

At times there was hardly enough to put into a spoon.

**I remember walking by a schoolmate's house in Kansas and seeing his shiny red pedal car on the sidewalk.**

When I was a little kid, we dreamed of owning such a plaything.

**Most of our toys were handmade or imaginary.**

**My brother Don and I played football in the front yard--actually on the strip between the sidewalk and the street.**

We didn't own a football; we used a round empty Quaker Oats box.

When we went across the street to shoot hoops on the schoolyard, we used an old tennis ball.

**At times I thought that the Lord had shortchanged me.**

**Yet the Lord gave me something precious that I haven't always appreciated. On occasion I've abused it.**

**I'm not talking about my mind.**

**The Lord gave you the same gift.**

Every person receives the same endowment.

**Few people think about it; fewer take care of their gift.**

**Yet it may be your most valuable possession.**

- **This gift works better than a compass.**
- **It's more helpful than a map or GPS.**
- **It's more valuable than Bill Gates's bank account.**

**I'm talking about your conscience.**

**What's the condition of your inner voice?**

**Have you given much thought lately to your conscience?**

**In a context strange to us, Paul dealt with conscience matters.**

**We'll look at it in a few minutes and consider three vital points about consciences.**

**The subject affects your happiness right now, your relationships with others, and your future.**

**In Kingsley, Iowa, Christians face various questions of conscience.**

**Not long ago someone intimated that I should stay out of Skootches Tavern.**

**I suspect that it's because they sell and serve booze.**

**Years ago when I worked for a major oil company, I attended a sales conference in San Francisco. A bunch of other salesmen invited me to go with them to the**

**Buena Vista Café (not far from Fishermen's Wharf as best I remember).**

**The guys wanted me to try some Irish coffee. I had no idea what it was, but I was willing to try it. We rode a cable car, and then walked a few blocks.**



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**The place was so crowded, there were no places to even sit and wait. Waiters walked through the crowds holding trays above their heads. Somehow my friends were able to order Irish coffee and had it brought to me. I tasted it and made the comment, "This stuff would gag a maggot!"**

**I didn't know it had whiskey in it.**

**One sip was enough for me.** In my opinion the whiskey ruined the coffee, the sweetener, and the cream they put in it. One of the guys finished it because he didn't want to waste the whiskey.

**Some of my Christian brothers and sisters would have been scandalized that I was at the Buena Vista Café.**

**I know my mother would have been.**

**Certain eating places caused difficulty in Corinth, but not because they sold booze.**

**Corinth had numerous temples where people sacrificed animals to pagan gods like Zeus and Astarte,**

**The priests couldn't eat all of that beef, mutton, and maybe pork, so they sold much of it.**

**Some pagan temples operated restaurants.**

**Others had meat markets to sell the surplus meat.**

**Did you know that in those days some of the inns also sold takeout food?**

**Let's say that one of your neighbors plans to have a banquet. Instead of going to Jeff's or Chet's, the neighbor stops by the Zeus temple meat market. Zeus worshipers may have just had a festival where many out-of-towners came to offer**

**sacrifices. The Zeus temple meat market is running a special on roast.**

**Or maybe your neighbor invites you to the temple restaurant for the meal.**

**What would you do?**

**Christian's consciences varied on the matter. Some people today struggle with whether to shop at Wal-Mart for various reasons. I'm not offering advice regarding that, only making a point about consciences and how they vary from person to person.**

**Some Christians in Corinth would have nothing to do with meat sacrificed to Zeus or Astarte. Their consciences wouldn't allow it. Others reasoned, "That meat is perfectly good. Zeus isn't real. There is only one God. What the priest of Zeus said over it doesn't change the meat. It's part of God's creation, and it doesn't matter to me."**

Years ago there was a Hindu temple that operated a restaurant across from Kaiser Hospital on Sunset Blvd. in LA. They advertised mushroom burgers or something like that. Though the food may have been okay, I never wanted to eat there.

**Could you have eaten there in good conscience?**

**Who judged correctly about the food in Corinth—the person who said that pagan gods aren't real or the ones whose consciences wouldn't allow them to eat meat sacrificed to idols?**

**Paul referred to the people who wouldn't eat that meat as the people with weak consciences.**

**But he also rebuked those who thought they had superior knowledge and felt free to eat that meat because those people didn't consider the consciences of the so-called "weak people."**

**Was Paul being a religious mugwump?**

**Here's what I think we should take from this chapter and from other teachings about conscience.**

**1. First, God gave us consciences for the same reason he equipped our bodies with those little electronic sensors called nerve endings. Nerve endings warn us about potential harm.**

**If you accidentally leaned against a sharp knife or some superheated object and felt no pain, it would be dangerous, wouldn't it?**

**As pain alerts us of potential harm, our conscience tells us we're doing things toxic to our psyches and our relationships with God.**

**If we continually overrule our consciences, we later pay the price not only in depression but other psychological problems.**

**No one seems to make the connection between all the talk about living the way you feel and**

**the current problems our society has with depression and stress.**

**Christians need to understand the correlation.**

A former park ranger at Yellowstone National Park tells the story of a ranger leading a group of hikers to a fire lookout. The ranger was so intent on telling the hikers about the flowers and animals that he considered the messages on his two-way radio distracting, so he switched it off. Nearing the tower, the ranger was met by a nearly breathless lookout, who asked why he hadn't responded to the messages on his radio. A grizzly bear had been seen stalking the group, and the authorities were trying to warn them of the danger.<sup>1</sup>

It is dangerous to override or try to turn off our conscience signals.

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<sup>1</sup> - Harold M. Wiest  
Dawson Creek,  
British Columbia, Canada  
From Leadership Journal

2. **Second, neither do we want to destroy or harm another person's conscience.** When we try to persuade another person to do something he/she feels is wrong, we're playing a dangerous game.

**Paul- "When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ."**

On hot summer days, Norma and I at times went the Beverly Center mall on the edge of Beverly Hills and Los Angeles.

We couldn't afford to purchase many things there, but it was always interesting to see what the other half of people bought-(the Beverly Hills crowd). We also looked for opportunities to share the Lord with folks.

One day we were outside a shop that sold sporting goods. A man and his wife sat watching people go in and out of the store.

We began visiting with them. They were pleasant, but sad. He had once been a star professional football player. He suffered cancer—his body only a hint of what it had once

been. When we informed him that we planned to move to Iowa, he told us that he went to college in Yankton.

I'm sure you older people would recognize his name.

Maybe some of you knew Lyle Alzado. We prayed for the opportunity to talk with him about Jesus. That time never came.

He died May. 14, 1992

Alzado played for the Denver Broncos, Cleveland Browns and Los Angeles Raiders. A true defensive standout for the Broncos, he was the first Yankton (South Dakota) College player ever drafted by the NFL and was a two-time All-Conference pick. From those humble beginnings, his combination of quickness and strength provided him with the pass-rushing skills to start with the Broncos in 1971. His 4.75 40-yard dash time, coupled with his tremendous strength (he once had 27 wins as an amateur boxer) ranked him as one of pro football's top pass rushers. His status as a premier defensive lineman was also enhanced by his versatility

- he played both end and tackle in the front four with All-pro status.

An American football Superbowl hero with the Los Angeles Raiders in the 1984, he owned a restaurant in West Hollywood and had embarked on a career as a movie actor. He died in 1992 after going public about his steroid use as a pro football player.

"I started taking anabolic steroids in 1969 and never stopped," he admitted during his pain-racked final days. "It was addicting, mentally addicting. Now I'm sick, and I'm scared. Ninety per cent of the athletes I know are on the stuff. We're not born to be 300 lbs. or jump 30ft. But all the time I was taking steroids, I knew they were making me play better. I became very violent on the field and off it. I did things only crazy people do. Once a guy sideswiped my car and I beat the hell out of him. Now look at me. My hair's gone, I wobble when I walk and have to hold on to someone for support, and I have trouble remembering things. My last wish? That no one else ever dies this way.

**Lyle Alzado was 42 when he died.**

**Quite likely when Alzado first started taking steroids, his conscience cautioned him, but he overrode it.**

**Do you wonder who advised the twenty-year-old Yankton College player to try steroids?**

Someone encouraged him to overrule his conscience convincing him he'd be a better player.

At the end Alzado hoped to quicken the consciences of others so they wouldn't make the same error and be ruined.



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We persuade people to overrule their consciences at great hazard.

**3. Third, we don't want to be responsible for destroying or numbing another person's conscience.**

We have an even greater responsibility, however.

**Christians have the duty of encouraging and strengthening others.**

An old Cherokee Indian taught his grandson about life this way. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight between two wolves.

One is evil-- he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is good--he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.

This same fight goes on inside you -- and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather,

"Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee replied, "The one you feed."

**Are you feeding God's righteousness or Satan's destruction?**

**Are you helping others win?**

**One more story about strengthening others. Wes Hirschman recently sent us this story.**

*Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital **room**. **One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back. The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation.***

*Every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside **the window.***

***The man in the other bed began to live for those one hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the***

*activity and color of the world outside.*

***The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.***

*As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the **picturesque scene.***

*One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't **hear the band** – he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Days and weeks passed.*

*One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was **saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away.***

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*As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved **next to the window**. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him **alone**. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the real **world outside**.*

*He strained to slowly turn to **look out the window beside the bed**.*

*It faced a blank wall.*

*The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his **deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window***

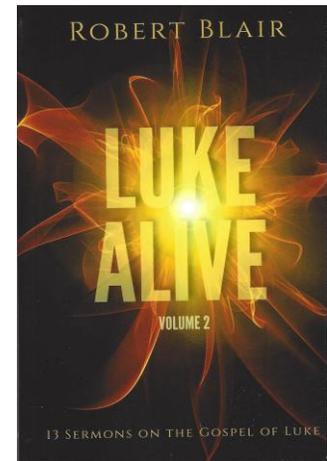
*The nurse responded that the **man was blind and could not even see the wall**.*

*She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to **encourage you**.*

**God assigned us the business of remaining close to Him and positively encouraging others to do the same.**



**Central Park West- Wikipedia**



*Bob Blair  
PO Box 176  
Cleghorn, IA 51014*

[www.robertblairbooks.com](http://www.robertblairbooks.com)