

# KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 8

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## **Abstract**

In this article, the way in which Paul defines the relationship between knowledge and love, especially as found in 1 Corinthians 8, will be discussed. This investigation intends to show that there is an undeniable friction between these two concepts that can only be dissolved, to the benefit of one another, in Christ alone!

## **1. Knowledge and Love in 1 Cor 8:1-3**

Paul introduces yet another one of the Corinthian believers' questions in chapter 8. He formulates it in a nutshell in 1 Cor 8:1a, *περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων* which may be translated as: “*And concerning the question about events (both social and cultic), where the eating of food (and especially also meat), being consecrated and/or offered to idols, is concerned..*”<sup>1</sup>

In 1 Cor 8:1b-3, οἶδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γνῶσιν ἔχομεν. ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ· εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι, οὕπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γνῶναι· εἰ δέ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ, Paul then addresses this issue as so simply put in 1 Cor 8:1a. He fires away by defining the difference between γνῶσις and ἀγάπη. He points out that knowledge is not necessarily bad—at least we all have it—1 Cor 8:1b, οἶδαμεν ὅτι πάντε γνῶσιν ἔχομεν! However, it is equally important to remember that knowledge is not only submissive to love, but could also lead to something bad<sup>2</sup>—a conclusion drawn from Paul’s comparison between γνῶσις and ἀγάπη in 1 Cor 8:1c, ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ. Paul warns that γνῶσις could grow into a “puffed up” kind of individualism,

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1 Because it is not the intention of this article to specifically focus on a clear definition of this question, the translation as argued in detail by De Wet (2005, 331-339) will suffice.

2 See further Willis (1985, 68-70); Gardner (1994, 22-23); Richter (1996, 562-563); Eriksson (1998, 150-151).

consequently paying less and less attention to the well-being of fellow-believers (Barrett 1965, 138-153)!<sup>3</sup> Mitchell (1991, 126) stresses it even further by pointing out the danger that the “illusion of self-confidence”, that γνῶσις may create, might even lead to division amongst fellow-believers in the end.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is especially Gardner (1994, 23-27), who has made a detailed study about the friction between γνῶσις and ἀγάπη as it is found here in 1 Cor 8:1-3.<sup>5</sup> He has argued convincingly that Paul is probably referring to some believers, who were trying to solve the problem of eating food/meat, being consecrated and/or offered to idols, by “building” their fellow-believers’ knowledge with a lot of clever arguments. Indeed however, with Paul’s comparison between γνῶσις and ἀγάπη he is actually pointing out the exact opposite, namely that γνῶσις does *not* “build up”, but that one should rather focus on ἀγάπη when “building up” needs to be done!<sup>6</sup> Love causes believers to take the results of their actions towards fellow-believers, especially the “weaker” brothers and sisters in faith, seriously into consideration.<sup>7</sup> In such a way the community of believers is being built up, rather than being continuously busy with their individual interests, consequently leading to a “breaking down” of the community or even a sense of “conquering”<sup>8</sup> the community!<sup>9</sup> Clearly Paul therefore contributes to the solution of the problem at hand, that the believers’ focus should be on ἀγάπη and not γνῶσις.

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3 See also Barrett (1971, 37; 189).

4 See also Thiselton (2000, 620-622); Theissen (1975, 155-172).

5 See also Fotopoulos (2003, 210).

6 Gardner (1994, 24) is of the opinion that we may find specifically here the answer for Paul’s use of no less than six references to the Greek φυσίωω in 1 Corinthians (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4), while it is only used once in the rest of the NT (Col 2:18)! Gardner points out that φυσίωω has its roots in a story about the complacency of a frog in the Greek fables (‘Aesop’s *Fables*’), that’s able to puff itself up with “air/wind”—against this ἀγάπη would then also refer to that which builds up, but then in a “solid” and “truthful” way. It seems as if there is at least a reasonable chance that Paul, with this background knowledge of φυσίωω in mind, could have hinted at the danger that γνῶσις also only puffs up with “air” and does not lead to the “solid, truthful” upliftment of our spiritual lives.

7 See also Newton (1998, 277).

8 See Thiselton’s (2000, 623) strong declaration in this regard.

9 See here particularly Maly (1967, 100-104) and Mitchell (1991, 126), as well as Kitzberger (1986, 73-38).

In 1 Cor 8:2, εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι, οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι, Paul sheds some light on yet another facet of the solution to the problem of τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων.<sup>10</sup> Here it is especially the time difference between ἐγνωκέναι and ἔγνω that is essential. In the first instance we are dealing with the *infinitive perfect* of γινώσκω and with ἔγνω we have the *aorist infinitive*. Therefore ἐγνωκέναι refers to a state of knowledge already acquired, while ἔγνω rather portrays a continuous action of knowledge being acquired. If, however, we are talking about γινῶσις" amongst fellow-believers, Paul warns us to acknowledge that we should always think of a dynamic, rather than a static course of action—thus the one believer, as well as the other, are constantly in a process of building knowledge, especially in the light of the fact that true knowledge is hidden in God himself and that no one in this world could ever possess it completely (Thiselton 2000, 623-625)!<sup>11</sup> If somebody would therefore claim that he has already attained the necessary knowledge (8:2a, εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι), he actually confesses through such a prideful statement that he doesn't have it yet, 1 Cor 8:2b: οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι!

Paul settles this part of his proposed solution in 1 Cor 8:3, εἰ δὲ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. Paul's intention could be summarized as follows: the core of true γινῶσις is to come to the understanding that ἀγάπη and in particular love to God, is that which truly concerns one (1 Cor 8:2<sup>12</sup>); when someone has this love for God (εἰ δὲ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν), it is therefore an immediate indication that he is in a relationship with God, that God knows him (οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ),<sup>13</sup> or if put differently, that God stands in an active, personal relationship with him,<sup>14</sup> based upon His

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10 See Nabers (1969, 73-82).

11 See particularly also Conzelmann (1975, 141) and Käsemann's (1969, 66-81) detailed discussion about the relationship between believers and γινῶσις.

12 1 Cor 8:2, εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωκέναι τι, οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι.

13 See further Wischmeyer (1987, 141-144).

14 See especially Fee (1987, 368), who also treats the verb, ἔγνωσται, rather as a medium, than a passive.

election<sup>15</sup> to do so!<sup>16</sup> Now, if this γνῶσις, that everything is actually about our love for God, started in the first place with God's deed of election, it implies clearly that believers received this important γνῶσις from God and thus have no reason at all to exalt themselves or to become arrogant (1 Cor 8:1c, ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ)!<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Knowledge and Love in 1 Cor 8:4-13

Paul continues his proposed solution in a second phase from 1 Cor 8:4-13. While Mitchell (1989, 233-234) tries to point out that the formula, *περὶ δέ* ..., in verse 4 simply introduces in a concise manner the next subject, Thiselton (2000, 628) has *adequately* argued otherwise.<sup>18</sup> According to Thiselton the formula would in this case rather be a reference to the subject at hand, as already introduced in 1 Cor 8:1-3 with reference to γνῶσις and ἀγάπη. It seems that it can be accepted with certainty that Paul continues in 1 Cor 8:4-13 with his proposed solution.

Paul begins this second phase of his solution in 1 Cor 8:4c by simply connecting with a generally accepted confession amongst believers,<sup>19</sup>

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15 Schrage (1995, 234-235) points out that ἔγνωσται has a connection with the Hebrew *יָדָע*, that definitely brings the OTic connection with godly election to the front and confirms it.

16 In opposition to Fee (1987, 368) Maly (1967, 103), Kistemaker (1993, 265), Schrage (1995, 233-235) and Strobel (1989, 135) choose to use, ἔγνωσται, as a passive, which in turn let the emphasis fall more on God's election of the believer, than on his active, personal relationship with the believer. It becomes clear from the chosen argument, that in this case a choice is made for both, together with Thiselton (2000, 627), because there is no pressing motivation to choose the one possibility over the other, as well as the fact that a combination of both strengthens Paul's argument so much more.

17 See also Thiselton (2000, 625-627), as well as Héring (1962, 68). The latter especially uses 1 Cor 13:12 (βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθη) to show, in relation with the relevant texts, that one actually only knows God and love, because God knows you, while Thiselton finds his connection with 1 Cor 4:7 (τίς γὰρ σε διακρίνει; τί δὲ ἔχεις ὃ οὐκ ἔλαβες; εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔλαβες, τί καυχᾶσαι ὡς μὴ λαβών;), which in line with Héring, as well as the above, proposed arguments confirm that nobody has any reason for arrogance! See especially Downing (1984, 176-177) for a further discussion of 1 Cor 13:12.

18 See also Fotopoulos (2003, 193-195).

19 We may accept that this confession was well-known and loved in the circle of believers, when one takes into consideration that it has its roots deep in the OT, as seen from prominent sections from the Jewish faith-history (Oropeza 1998, 59)—Deut 6:4,

namely the monotheistic proclamation of faith in only one God<sup>20</sup> (ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς). On the other hand he introduces a second statement of faith, that every believer should actually deduce by implication from the first confession,<sup>21</sup> namely: οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὐδὲν εἰδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ (1 Cor 8:4b). Exegetes are actually divided about what Paul precisely meant by this: while some<sup>22</sup> are of the opinion that οὐδὲν εἰδωλον has to be translated as “no idol exists”, others<sup>23</sup> want to treat it as a predicative and translate it as “an idol is nothing/not real”. It is especially Schrage (1995:236-237) that argued convincingly regarding the latter possibility that Paul created a clear contrast between οὐδὲν εἰδωλον and ἐν κόσμῳ, by placing that which “really” exists, the κόσμος, directly next to the idols, εἰδωλον, of which the existence can actually not be proven and therefore only exist in human concepts/fantasies.<sup>24</sup> Paul thus begins this phase of his solution with two sets of faith statements, which on the one hand connect with each other, but on the other hand it is also generally accepted that there is only one true God, who really exists. However, on the contrary some might still proclaim the existence of idols, although it is obviously clear that (in all of creation/whole universe) it is definitely not so.<sup>25</sup>

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רָאוּ עֵתָהּ כִּי אֵין אֵין הוּא וְאֵין אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדֵי אֵין, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד; Deut 32:39, כֹּה־אִמַּר יְהוָה מַלְדֵּי־שְׂרָאֵל וְגֹאֲלֵוֹ יְהוָה עֲבָאֹת אֵין רִאשׁוֹן וְאֵין אַחֲרָיו, אֱמִית וְאַחֲזִיָּהּ וּמִבְלַעֲדֵי אֵין אֱלֹהִים. See further Thiselton (2000, 629), as well as Weiss ([1910] 1977, 219), Wolff (1996, 171), Schrage (1995, 237) and Strobel (1989, 135), to name but a few who all confirm the same.

20 See also 8:6, but especially v6a, with the same monotheistic confession: ὅλλ’ ἡμῖν εἷς θεός.

21 See especially Byrskog (1996, 230-250) for Paul’s effective identification with the Corinthian believers.

22 See especially Héring (1962, 68), who tries to reason that οὐδὲν εἰδωλον (“no idol exists”) and οὐδεὶς θεός (“no God exists except One”) stand parallel with each other and should therefore be translated as such—an argument that cannot be accepted only on these grounds.

23 See here in particular Schrage (1995, 236), but also Yeo (1995, 188) and Thiselton (2000, 630).

24 See also further Denaux (1996, 594-606).

25 See further Fee (1987, 370-371); Gooch (1993, 62-63); Schrage (1995, 221); Richter (1996, 562-563); Hofius (1997, 99-101).

Next (1 Cor 8:5-6<sup>26</sup>) Paul exploits the latter,<sup>27</sup> actually “impossible possibility”<sup>28</sup> for the sake of argument,<sup>28</sup> namely that for some, “weak” believers,<sup>29</sup> the “so-called” gods (λεγόμενοι θεοί) still exist. For these believers it is difficult to come to terms with the fact that these gods don’t really exist at all, especially after they’ve been influenced otherwise over many years within the heathen cults, namely to think that these idols, being called θεοί and κύριοι are real and should therefore be worshipped as such. Paul now shares in 1 Cor 8:6, over against this lie that’s been proclaimed to the heathen-Christians, the truth. This he does in a unique way:<sup>30</sup> on the one hand he confirms to the “strong” believers that their belief is true and worthy, while on the other hand he also helps the new, still “weak” believers

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26 1 Cor 8:5-6, καὶ γὰρ εἴπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοὶ εἴτε ἐν οὐρανῷ εἴτε ἐπὶ γῆς, ὥσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοὶ, ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ.

27 See Willis (1985, 83-87); Cheung (1999, 123).

28 See Robertson and Plummer (1914, 167); Collins (1999, 315); Schrage (1995, 239); Barrett (1971, 191); Thiselton (2000, 632).

29 Concerning Paul’s use of these two terms, ἀσθενής (weak) and ἰσχυρός (strong), with reference to the believers of the Corinthian congregation, we’ve had a wide variety of theological discussions in the past. The aim of this research does not require a lot of detail—for more information one may consult for instance Söding (1994, 69-142). However, it is necessary to acknowledge the conclusion, as drawn by especially Theissen (1982, 121-144), namely that ἀσθενής and ἰσχυρός refer in particular to the socio-economical state of the believers. While ἰσχυρός thus refers to a specific steadfast and safe social and economical position, with a certain level of religious insight, ἀσθενής on the other hand, refers to the somewhat uncertain position of a believer with respect to other believers, especially in a sociological sense, but also in respect of the level of spiritual knowledge. Furthermore, generally ἀσθενής also refers to believers from a lower socio-economical income class. After Yeo (1995, 90) largely argues in the same direction as Theissen, he points to an important remark, namely that specifically these differences between ἀσθενής and ἰσχυρός, actually causes the former to continuously yearn for acknowledgement and acceptance by the latter group. This could of course lead the “weak” believers into doing something that might not be good for their spiritual lives, perhaps even completely wrong, simply because of their longing to win the favour of the “strong”!

30 Dunn (1980, 180; 1998, 28-50), has shown that Paul’s casting of roles here to God and Jesus, specifically with reference to creation, has no early parallels. Paul also does not ascribe in any other place in his letters this mediatorial function, as part of creation, to Christ (Collins 1999, 320).

to understand clearly what the actual truth is that should be believed.<sup>31</sup> Paul goes about this by using the Shema, as found in Deut 6:4,<sup>32</sup> and reinterpreting it Christologically<sup>33</sup>—in this way Jesus is being associated in 1 Cor 8:6 in an exclusive, but at the same time inclusive way, with the one, only and unique God of creation (ν6α, εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα) of the OT and the Jewish tradition,<sup>34</sup> as this God's unique Agent through Whom everything was created (1 Cor 8:6b, εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα).<sup>35</sup> Hereby Paul attempts to assist especially the “weak” believers not to experience a theological gap between God's act of creation and his soteriological intervention:<sup>36</sup> the God who creates and the God who saves is one and the same God (1 Cor 8:6a-b, ἀλλ' ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ... καὶ εἷς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός) and outside of Him there is no other god.<sup>37</sup> To say it differently: the Lord through Whom salvation for the believer has come, is also the Lord through Whom all things came into existence—thus, as put in ν6, *through* Him (ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ) we live *to* Him (ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν)!<sup>38</sup>

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31 See especially Thiselton (2000, 636-638). Take note that this does not imply that Paul tried to “uplift” the knowledge of the “weaker” believers, in order to get them on the same level as the “stronger” ones—rather it is meant that Paul simply connects on the one hand to an old, well-known religious truth, while on the other hand he wants to help other believers to gain insight in this core truth. If Paul only cared about the building of spiritual knowledge, he would not have continued to explain, with such a great effort, to the “stronger” believers how to meet the “weaker” believers half-way! This would of course also have been contradictory to Paul's own advice about the nature of γνῶσις and the believers' behaviour thereto, as mentioned above in the discussion of 1 Cor 8:1-3. Also refer to Gardner (1994, 40) concerning this issue.

32 Deut 6:4, דְּבָרֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה יְשׁוּבָה יְשׁוּבָה.

33 In the words of Collins (1999, 315): ‘Paul's understanding of God was affected by his understanding of Christ’.

34 For further discussion, with reference to other potential theological backgrounds of this confession, one may consult especially: Conzelmann (1975, 144-145) and Horsley (1978b, 130-135; 1978a, 574-589; 1981, 32-51).

35 See here in particular Hurtado (1988, 97-99), but also Ellis (1986, 494-495).

36 See also Bell (2002, 25).

37 In Dunn's (1980, 180) words: ‘the unity of creation and salvation, to prevent a split in the Corinthian's thinking between their experience of spiritual power and their attitude to the material world...’.

38 See especially Richardson (1994, 296-304), Cullmann ([1957] 1975, 241-254) and Taylor (1958, 51) for a closer discussion of δι' αὐτοῦ and εἰς αὐτόν.

Paul realises that especially believers who converted recently and do not have this knowledge yet (1 Cor 8:7a, Ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἐν πάσιν ἡ γνῶσις), even though it is presented to them within a relationship of brotherly love, still sometimes struggle to totally grasp it all, simply because they have become accustomed to another truth for *so* long (1 Cor 8:7b, τινὲς δὲ τῇ συνηθείᾳ ἕως ἄρτι τοῦ εἰδῶλου...).<sup>39</sup> Therefore, wrong habits,<sup>40</sup> being taught over such a long period, have to be broken down<sup>41</sup> so that the, now still “weak”, believers may come to realise that the gods whom they experienced as true,<sup>42</sup> are actually no gods at all!<sup>43</sup> Simultaneously however, one has to acknowledge immediately that, although Paul strongly claims faith in one God,<sup>44</sup> it does not imply that he rejects the belief that even though there is no other god behind the idols, there still exists another “power”, namely Satan and his demonic powers (Thiselton 2000, 632-633).<sup>45</sup> This is of course exactly the reason why it is so important for Paul that the “strong” believers should take the “weak” believers seriously into consideration when it concerns meals with food/meat, that has been consecrated and/or sacrificed to some kind of idol.<sup>46</sup>

Paul strongly motivates a support system between “strong” and “weak” believers. He also adds a warning to the “strong” believers. He begins his motivation with 1 Cor 8:7c, καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενῆς οὖσα μολύνεται. Paul reminds the “strong” believers that the conscience (συνείδησις) of the “weak” believers is still frequently a stumbling block to them and therefore they should be taken into consideration accordingly.<sup>47</sup> Even though it is not easy to determine exactly what Paul had in mind with

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39 See in particular also Smit (1997, 476-491).

40 See especially Dawes (1996, 88-89).

41 Thiselton (2000, 633) refers to it like this: ‘...*habituated patterns of loyalty and devotion* long practised by new converts before their conversion *cannot simply be brushed aside as no longer affecting their lives and attitudes in the present*’ [Thiselton’s italics].

42 Gill (1991, 13-24) confirms that the idols at these sacrifices were definitely experienced as real and truly present. See also Fotopoulos (2003, 175-176).

43 See also Fee (1987, 381); Murphy-O’Connor (1978b, 554).

44 See also Giblin (1975, 524-547).

45 See especially Fee (1987, 369); Barrett (1971, 192); Yeo (1995, 189-190); Wolff (1996, 171-172), as well as Murphy-O’Connor (1978a, 253-267).

46 See also Fotopoulos (2003, 215-216).

47 See also Fee (1987, 379-380); Thiselton (2000, 639).



συνείδησις,<sup>48</sup> it seems that he had at least three intentions with the phrase, καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενῆς οὕσα μολύνεται all in close relation with each other.<sup>49</sup> In the first instance Paul is possibly suggesting that because the “weak” believers cannot yet discern clearly between right and wrong (ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενῆς), they unfortunately, more often than they would of course like to, do the wrong thing.<sup>50</sup> Resulting in feelings of failure their conscience is hurt and burdened (οὕσα μολύνεται). In the third place emotions like these also have a negative impact on the believers’ self-image by robbing them from any “self-worth”, which in turn strengthens the feelings of failure and subsequently leads to a situation where the believers get even “weaker” when compared to the “strong” believers. Finally this could result in a further down-ward spiral where the “weak” believers, now struggling with a “heavier” συνείδησις than ever before, may be at fault even more so than when they started out!<sup>51</sup> This concludes the first reason whereby Paul motivates the “strong” believers to take the “weak” believers carefully into consideration: keep your fellow-believers’ “weaker” conscience in mind whenever you want to eat food/meat that’s been consecrated and/or sacrificed to idols!<sup>52</sup>

The second motivation that Paul introduces to lead the “strong” believers acting correctly towards the “weak” believers, is found in 1 Cor 8:8, βρῶμα

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48 Thiselton (2000, 640-644) has a thorough discussion about the meaning of οὕσα μολύνεται, where he attends to all the phases that exegesis, with reference to this term, went through over time—definitely a piece of research that’s worth while to work through! However, for the scope of this investigation it is necessary to point out that at least two large possibilities should be taken into account when attending to συνείδησις: it may either be seen in reference to “conscience”, or it may be understood as “self-image/self-worth”. While Whiteley (1974, 44) and Pierce (1955, 13-20) choose broadly for “conscience”, the following scholars choose rather “self-image/self-worth”: Thiselton (2000, 640-644); Eckstein (1983, 35-135); Horsley (1978a, 574-589); Willis (1985, 89-96); Gooch (1987, 244-254); Gardner (1994, 42-54). See also further especially Jewett (1971, 402-446); Sevenster (1961, 84-102); Thrall (1967, 118-125). As it will also be discussed later on in this study, it is my opinion that it is unnecessary to make a definite choice either for the one or the other, because the identified possibilities are completely connected with one another and should rather be seen as referring to different experiences, relating to the same concern, that the believer simply experiences at different stages.

49 See also Tomson (1990, 195-216).

50 See especially Dawes (1996, 95).

51 See especially Fotopoulos (2003, 216).

52 See also Horsley (1978a, 581-582).

δὲ ἡμᾶς οὐ παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ· οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν.<sup>53</sup> Now the question is obviously: how does Paul use this statement to make the “strong” ones more sensitive to their fellow “weaker” believers? In order to answer this question it is necessary to first fully understand what Paul has in mind when he uses the phrase, παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ. It has already been sufficiently argued by many<sup>54</sup> that Paul didn’t have, by using παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ, any symbolic, spatial reference to the placing of believers in mind. In other words that βρῶμα, either referring to the correct or wrong kinds of food, or on the other hand the correct or wrong way of handling it (οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν), will not place the believer “closer” or “further” from God.<sup>55</sup> Rather, given the specific context of the problem at hand, Paul is referring to the fact that the way in which believers deal with βρῶμα, do not place them in a better legal and/or state of faith before God.<sup>56</sup> Paul therefore convinces the “strong” believers that they cannot “impress” God by proving to Him that they are able to eat food/meat that has been consecrated/sacrificed to idols, without impacting their faith negatively. In this way the “strong” believers actually place God under obligation to ascribe to them a higher state of faith and to declare them as “righteous”.<sup>57</sup> Such a forceful, manipulating action, Paul wants to confirm to the “strong” believers, is most definitely impossible: to stand firm as believer, no matter what food/meat one eats, whether consecrated/sacrificed to idols or not, does not at all influence your state of faith before God.<sup>58</sup>

After arguing convincingly in 1 Cor 8:8 that the “strong” believers are wrong with their above way of reasoning, Paul wants to motivate these believers not to hold on so tight, even at the cost of their fellow “weaker” believers, to a so-called freedom of continuing participating in meals which involve food/meat having been consecrated/sacrificed to idols. Furthermore Paul actually makes use of the “freedom” being claimed by the “strong” believers, to warn them that it is exactly things like ἐξουσία that may cause

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53 See also Smit (1997, 480-481).

54 See Schrage (1995, 259-260); Wolff (1996, 179-180); Conzelmann (1975, 146-148); Collins (1999, 321-325); Fee (1987, 382-383).

55 See further Fotopoulos (2003, 216-218).

56 See here in particular Murphy-O’Connor (1979, 292-297) and Gardner (1994, 48-54).

57 See also further Thiselton (2000, 645-649).

58 See also Fotopoulos (2003, 218); Fee (1987, 384).

“weak” believers to sin—as put in 1 Cor 8:9, βλέπετε δὲ μή πως ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὐτῇ πρόσκομμα γένηται τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν.<sup>59</sup> The “strong” believers thus have to take care that their “right to choose”,<sup>60</sup> their “freedom”,<sup>61</sup> doesn’t become a πρόσκομμα, in other words a reason for the “weaker” believers to *stumble* in their faith.<sup>62</sup> It is especially Gardner (1994, 55) who has argued convincingly that Paul, by using specifically ὑμῶν excludes himself from this self-acclaimed “right” of the “strong” believers, while these believers on the other hand, were most probably of the opinion that they actually deserved this “right to choose”, by earning it on the grounds of their superior knowledge, as referred to in 1 Cor 8:1-3.<sup>63</sup> He also motivates this connection well by pointing out that αὕτη refers to a specific ἐξουσία namely that which relate to the former γνώσις<sup>64</sup> In this way the “strong” believers would have exalted their “right to choose” to such a level, that they believe they have the liberty to exercise this power, no matter the cost to other believers (Thiselton 2000, 648-650)!<sup>65</sup>

The warning, as referred to in 1 Cor 8:9 and discussed above, is continued by Paul in verse 10 with an example of how things could go wrong, if the “strong” believers disregard Paul’s advice: ἐὰν γὰρ τις ἴδῃ σὲ τὸν ἔχοντα γνώσιν ἐν εἰδωλείῳ κατακείμενον, οὐχὶ ἡ συνειδήσις αὐτοῦ ἀσθενοῦς ὄντος οἰκοδομηθήσεται εἰς τὸ τὰ εἰδωλόθυτα ἐσθίειν;<sup>66</sup> By using

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59 See Dawes (1996, 89).

60 See also Weiss ([1910]1977, 227-229); Gooch (1993, 79); Brunt (1985, 114); Klauck (1982, 248).

61 It is especially Thiselton (2000, 649) who argues convincingly that the “freedom” to which ἐξουσία refers is a freedom that specifically has to do with the “exercising of certain choices”—in this instance it concerns of course the choice of whether food/meat consecrated and/or sacrificed to idols should be eaten or not.

62 Gardner (1994, 54-63) points out that πρόσκομμα most definitely refers back to Paul’s use of σκάνδαλον in 1 Cor 1:23a, ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίοις μὲν σκάνδαλον. According to this, πρόσκομμα therefore relates to the meaning of “to stumble over something”, with an OT background in for instance Isa 8:14, where the LXX refers to the “stone that causes stumbling”, λίθος προσκόμματος. See also further Oropeza (1998, 66-67) and Thiselton (2000, 649).

63 See also especially Malherbe (1995, 233-241).

64 See also Horsley (1978a, 579-581); Fee (1987, 384); Smit (1997, 482); Schrage (1995, 261).

65 See also in particular Winter’s (2001, 269-286) discussion of ἐξουσία, as well as Fotopoulos (2003, 219-220).

66 See also Smit (1997, 481-483).

this example in 1 Cor 8:10 Paul is saying: whenever the “strong” believers have a choice to eat in a heathen temple and they would reason that on the grounds of their γνώσις they have the right to enjoy their freedom and therefore go and have a seat in an open area “restaurant”, the possibility is great that they may be seen by someone with a weak conscience/self-worth.<sup>67</sup> Simply because of the “weak” believers’ need for acceptance and acknowledgement by the “stronger” believers, it will be virtually impossible for these believers not to sit down with the “strong” ones and enjoy some of the food/meat with them. The problem is that for the “weaker” believers the connotation with the idols/demons may still be very real, leading to the conclusion<sup>68</sup> Paul defines in 1 Cor 8:11-12: ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἄσθενῶν ἐν τῷ σῶ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι’ ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν. οὗτως δὲ ἁμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τύπτοντες αὐτῶν τὴν συνείδησιν ἄσθενοῦσαν εἰς Χριστὸν ἁμαρτάνετε. Thus, apart from what the “strong” believers might think, the “freedom” to use their γνώσις does not actually *build*<sup>69</sup> the faith of the fellow-believers, but rather *breaks it down!*<sup>70</sup> By using these contrasting images of “building up” and “breaking down”, Paul emphasizes without a doubt that drastic consequences would follow, should his warning in 1 Cor

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67 See also Thiselton (2000, 7-8) and Oster (1992, 52-73). See further the summary of Fotopoulos (2003, 221-222) on similar meals at the temples in Corinth.

68 Edwards (1885, 223-224), as well as Thiselton (2000, 653), makes it clear that 1 Cor 8:11 is definitely not part of verse 10, but rather the logical consequence of the actions, as spelled out in the example of v10—this is clearly supported by Paul’s use of γάρ.

69 It has already been argued convincingly that οἰκοδομηθήσεται of 1 Cor 8:10 should not be translated with “promoted”, but that the “building”-image language should be kept (Fee 1987, 386; Héring 1962, 73). This would indeed not only connect to the same thought of love that builds “constructively” and knowledge that builds “with air”, as was set forth in 1 Cor 8:1b-c (ἡ γνώσις φυσιοῦ, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ) (Strobel 1989:138), but it also supports Paul’s emphasize of this image in the rest of the letter—see for instance also 1 Cor 3:9, θεοῦ γὰρ ἔσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομῆ ἔστε and 1 Cor 10:23, Πάντα ἔξεστιν ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει· πάντα ἔξεστιν ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ, as well as a large sum of occurrences in 1 Cor 14, namely in vv3, 4, 5, 12, 17 and 26 (Edwards 1885, 223; Godet 1886, 426; Thiselton 2000, 652).

70 Here, of course, we find yet another reason to stick to the building-image when translating οἰκοδομηθήσεται in 1 Cor 8:10, namely that the contrast with ἀπόλλυται in 1 Cor 8:11 comes to the front so much clearer, which supports Paul’s point therefore simply so much better, as will be pointed out even further through this investigation (Robertson & Plummer 1914, 172). Especially this functional contrast means by implication that, “to break down” still continues to be the logical and most useful choice for a translation of ἀπόλλυται (Thiselton 2000, 653).

8:9 be ignored.<sup>71</sup> It is especially Gundry-Volf (1990, 85-97) who makes an important contribution to this by pointing out that ἀπόλλυται does not only refer to eschatological “destruction”, but also to a “break down” of the fellow-believers’ current existence. In other words it may happen that the “weak” believers fall back into all sorts of heathen customs and rituals, thus finally heading towards their eschatological destruction!<sup>72</sup> Exactly how “drastic” these consequences might be, are clearly spelled out at the end of 1 Cor 8:11, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι’ ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν. Once again Paul emphasizes the harsh consequences of such a behavior by “strong” believers, by citing no less than three contrasts in this one, short phrase (see especially Thiselton 2000, 654). First Paul contrasts the earlier, almost clinical use of τῷ σοῦ γνώσει whereby “you/your” refers to the “strong” believers, to ὁ ἀδελφός a dominantly lovable and family term, referring to the “weak” believers. Secondly Paul contrasts the “strong” believers’ selfish claim/right to freedom of choice with Χριστὸς who gave up any right/freedom of choice with his totally *unselfish* redeeming death—and this especially also for the “weak” believers! Lastly Paul contrasts also, although only by implication, the motivation of Christ’s actions/death, with the motives of the “strong” believers’ actions—while their actions are being driven by γνῶσις Christ’s actions/death were clearly initiated from pure ἀγάπη. So, through all of these contrasts Paul is making it painstakingly clear that the “weak” believers can easily be “destroyed/broken down”, with drastic consequences, by the insensitive actions of the “strong” believers. It is necessary for the “strong” believer to thoroughly realise that the “weak” believer is not merely “weak”, but also an ἀδελφός; even more so, he/she is also someone for whom Christ sacrificed his freedom of choice to heavenly glory, someone for whom Christ died and further, that He has done all of this because He simply loves, also in particular, the “weak” believers!

Of course, all of this leads to the following, obvious conclusion:<sup>73</sup> with “drastic consequences” it is not only the “breaking down” of the “weak” believers that is implied, specifically also concerning their conscience (see 1

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71 See also Malherbe (1995, 238).

72 See also Schrage (1995, 265-266).

73 The fact that 1 Cor 8:12 is introduced with the emphatic use of οὕτως, confirms that Paul is referring back to that which has been said recently and therefore it is correct to see v12 as a conclusion of the preceding (Robertson & Plummer 1914, 172; Fee 1987, 388; Thiselton 2000, 654).

Cor 8:12b, καὶ τύπτοντες αὐτῶν τὴν συνείδησιν ἄσθενοῦσαν), but these drastic implications also include negative consequences for the “strong” believers.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, on the one hand they sin against their fellow-believers, “brothers”, according to 1 Cor 8:12a, οὕτως δὲ ἁμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς, but on the other hand, all the more, they sin against Christ Himself: εἰς Χριστὸν ἁμαρτάνετε (1 Cor 8:12c)! The use of the adjective, “drastic”, to describe the consequences of the “strong” believers’ behaviour, is indeed tragically appropriate: not only is the sin against their “brothers” expressed in strong terms, but it is further seen as direct sin against Christ!<sup>75</sup> Regarding the harsh referral to sin against the “brothers”, it should be noted that the word Paul uses to describe the damage done to the συνείδησις of the “weak” believers, τύπτω, for the most part<sup>76</sup> refers to “blows planted with the intention of causing damage” and therefore distinctly emphasizes real damage being caused (Thiselton 2000, 654). Moreover, by comparing this sin against the “brothers”, with direct sinning against Christ (οὕτως δὲ ἁμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς...εἰς Χριστὸν ἁμαρτάνετε), Paul reaches the climax of his argument! Also, obviously it must have been the most difficult thing for the “strong” believers to hear that exactly that which they thought they actually succeeded in, namely that by eating food/meat, being consecrated and/or sacrificed to idols, they could prove to God how steadfast they were, in fact only resulted in sinning against their fellow-believers...and against the Lord himself...!<sup>77</sup>

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74 See also Fotopoulos (2003, 221-222).

75 See also Oropeza (1998, 66).

76 See Stählin (1972, 260-269), as well as Danker’s (2000, 830) Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.

77 Robinson (1952, 58) provides an extremely interesting explanation for Paul’s convenient comparison that he draws between sin against fellow-believers that could just as easily be seen as sin against Christ. Robinson refers namely to Paul’s Damascus experience, where Jesus asked Paul on the one hand why he persecuted Him and on the other hand fixed Paul’s attention to the fact that he’s actually busy to persecute Jesus Himself—see Acts 9:3-5, Ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίξειν τῷ Δαμασκῷ, ἐξάφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ· Σαούλ Σαούλ, τί με διώκεις; εἶπεν δέ· τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις. Next, one can easily agree with Robinson that it was not difficult at all for Paul to look a fellow-believer in the eye and simultaneously see Christ staring back at him! See also Thornton (1950, 40) and Thiselton (2000, 655), as well as Gal 4:14, who emphasize the same thought: καὶ τὸν πειρασμὸν ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδέξασθε με, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

It is precisely this very last line of thought that prompts Paul to share in 1 Cor 8:13 with the “strong” believers the example that he would have set (οὐ μὴ φάγω κρέα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἵνα μὴ τὸν ἀδελφόν μου σκανδαλίσω),<sup>78</sup> given the same circumstances (εἰ βρώμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν ἀδελφόν μου).<sup>79</sup> The following is interesting from the example Paul proposes: in the first place he connects to the imagery as introduced in 1 Cor 8:11, namely to refer to the “weak” believer as “brother” (ἀδελφός) and more specifically as “my” brother (τὸν ἀδελφόν μου). Secondly Paul uses σκανδαλίζω to describe what could happen to this brother of him, a word that in itself carries a twofold meaning, namely “to lay down that which causes stumbling” and then of course also the action that follows: “to stumble”. This then being the reason why Fee (1987, 389) and Thiselton (2000, 656-657) argue convincingly that σκανδαλίζω should be translated with something more forceful than “to stumble”, like for instance “to cause someone’s downfall”. This will then include not only that something specifically led to the “downfall”, but also the eventual consequence of this action, namely the “downfall” itself. When Paul therefore reconstructs that which potentially could have happened, he encourages through this example the “strong” believers to recognize that they have to look differently at the current issue. Thus, part of the solution to address the whole issue of whether food/meat that has been consecrated and/or sacrificed to idols should be eaten or not, is to recognize that there are at least two perspectives when looking at this situation, with two very different courses of actions to follow. If one would look only from an “earthly” level at the situation at hand, then it would simply be a case of a “weaker” believer doing “something wrong” by joining you in a meal of the above-mentioned food/meat. When, however, looking from a “spiritual” angle, as Paul would like to illustrate, it is “your brother” (joined to Christ, just like you), whom “you have led to go to rack and ruin”,<sup>80</sup> and “have even looked upon this brother’s downfall”, while eating this specific food/meat!<sup>81</sup>

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78 Robertson and Plummer (1914, 173) already argued convincingly that διότι points to an emphatic, logical connection with the preceding thought—Thiselton (2000, 656) also confirms this. See also Conzelmann (1975, 149); Fee (1987, 389); Willis (1985, 108); Lindemann (2000, 198).

79 See also Smit (1997, 483-484).

80 See Fotopoulos (2003, 222).

81 See also Brunt (1985, 113-114).

Given the circumstances as discussed above, Paul does not only want to help the “strong” believers to look at the situation from the correct angle, but he also wants to provide them with an example of how he himself would have handled it.<sup>82</sup> Then, to say the least, for Paul the example to be followed should not be difficult at all: εἰ βρῶμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, οὐ μὴ φάγω κρέα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. Therefore, “if” (εἰ) it is “meat” (βρῶμα) that causes “my brother” (τὸν ἀδελφόν μου) to “stumble” (σκανδαλίζει), I will “certainly never, as long as I live [eat again]” (οὐ μὴ [φάγω] ...εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) “meat of any kind”<sup>83</sup> (κρέα). To grasp the radical nature of Paul’s suggested example, as well as the full intensity of his solution, as being discussed, it is necessary to make a remark or two on the last two phrases, namely οὐ μὴ φάγω...εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα and κρέα.

First, regarding οὐ μὴ φάγω...εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, the following remark: it is striking that Paul has chosen an emphatic way to express the negative here. Not only is it a double negative (οὐ μὴ), combined with a second aorist subjunctive (φάγω from ἐσθίω), in other words the most explicit way to give expression to a negative relating the future,<sup>84</sup> but Paul also makes further use of εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, whereby he gives expression to a very “long” future, to tell the truth, a future that will outlast his lifetime!<sup>85</sup>

Secondly, a remark on the specific use of κρέα. It is indeed interesting that Paul decides to choose the plural, κρέα, instead of the singular form, κρέας, given that the latter is actually in itself a collective noun.<sup>86</sup> It is naturally even more striking when one takes note of the fact that when Paul chooses to use βρῶμα, only in the previous phrase (1 Cor 8:13a, διόπερ εἰ βρῶμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν ἀδελφόν μου), he decides to use the singular! Therefore, with this clearly well-thought-out choice of Paul, he must have had something very specific in mind and then it seems that Thiselton (2000, 657) is correct when he argues convincingly that the answer lies in the different emphasis placed on the meaning of either the normal plural on the one hand or the plural form of an already collective noun on the other. Thus, when a choice is made in favour of, for instance, “a lot of meats or cheeses”,

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82 See Castelli (1991, 86), but also Fiore (1986, 164-190).

83 See Conzelmann (1975, 150).

84 See especially Thiselton (2000, 657), as well as similar occurrences in, for example, Matt 26:35a, λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Πέτρος· κἀν δέη με σὺν σοὶ ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι.

85 See Fee (1987, 389; Collins (1999, 321, 327); Thiselton (2000, 657).

86 See Thiselton (2000, 657).



instead of simply using “a lot of meat or cheese”, this does not suggest a *large amount of one type of meat or cheese*, but rather refers to a *whole variety of different kinds of meat or cheese*. Applied to Paul’s example that he is trying to set, it refers to the fact that he would be willing, in a situation like this, to never eat meat of any kind again, as long as he might live<sup>87</sup>—whether it would be meat as found directly at the temples, or meat as received from the butcher, to be enjoyed at home.<sup>88</sup>

It is indeed hidden away in the extremities to which Paul is prepared to go that we probably find the greatest worth of Paul’s solution to the “strong” believers’ problem. To be as radical as to “never, ever again” eat “meat of any kind”, in situations where the “weak” believer and brother in Christ may be “pulled down” lightens the heart of Paul’s solution! Paul is without a doubt willing to not only “twist” his right of freedom of choice a little bit, but literally give it up totally, in all situations, for ever—and this being a “right” that he definitely would have earned, according to the “strong” believers, on the ground of the knowledge that he obviously has for a fact (Paul did indeed spell it out so clearly in especially vv.4-6, but also in v.8)!<sup>89</sup> Surely the “strong” believers would have to acknowledge: it is impossible that such actions are being motivated by self-conceit or selfish intentions. It can most definitely only be a motivation out of “love” for one another (irrespective of whether they are “weaker” believers—perhaps it is rather a case of: because they are exactly such)!

### **3. The Relationship between Knowledge and Love According to 1 Cor 8**

It is clear that a healthy friction exists between knowledge and love that needs to be addressed with great caution. When one allows a free hand to knowledge, it may quickly lead to exalted individualism, which will in turn violate the spiritual well-being of fellow-believers and may even instigate division amongst themselves.

It is therefore very important to have the correct perspective on the nature of knowledge. One needs to understand that the centre of true knowledge lies in the fact that love for God is that which really matters and

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87 See Fotopoulos (2003, 222); Cheung (1999, 137-138).

88 See also Schrage (1995, 268).

89 See especially Fotopoulos (2003, 223).

precisely so, because God chose the believer to be in a relationship with Him! It is therefore impossible that true knowledge may lead to arrogance. True knowledge would much rather function willingly subordinately to love, consequently causing believers to take the effect of their actions on fellow-believers closely and seriously into consideration.

This friction between knowledge and love, with its special perspective thereupon, is used by Paul to address the problem regarding the eating of food, consecrated to idols. From the knowledge side of the argument Paul points out that believers find themselves often on different levels of knowledge. In this instance some believers (the “strong” ones) have the knowledge that there is only one, true God and that food consecrated to the idols may therefore be eaten with confidence—actually so much so that the idol does not even have to be mentioned, because it obviously simply does not exist at all! On the other hand there are fellow-believers (the “weaker” ones) who, because of their long connection with the heathen cults and idols, still struggle to fully understand all the implications concerning this knowledge that there is only one, true God and whose conscience therefore makes them stumble easily.

Therefore Paul’s advice: Firstly he points out that knowledge may not be (mis)used to try and impress God or even manipulate Him by staying unshakable in faith, notwithstanding the fact that believers are sharing in meals with food consecrated to idols. It is impossible to, on this ground, expect from God to offer some sort of justification or even appoint some special state of faith to these believers. Secondly, thorough knowledge does not imply a right to freedom of choice, even at the cost of fellow-believers’ spiritual well-being.

Paul is rather arguing that “stronger” believers should exert their knowledge in service of love! It is therefore surely no coincidence that the “weaker” fellow-believers are being defined by Paul at the end of his argument with the loving, family term “brother”. Without arrogance and in subordination to love, knowledge should lead to a voluntary, selfless abandonment of any rights to freedom of choice, with the spiritual well-being of fellow-believers absolutely in focus!

Such a relationship between knowledge and love glorifies Christ’s example of selfless love, but also honours the value of fellow-believers’ union with our Lord Jesus! In conclusion then the radical assumption that Paul closes his argument with, namely to never eat meat of any kind ever again, should the smallest possibility exists that it might lead to the

stumbling of a fellow-brother. This actually summarizes the relationship between knowledge and love the best: knowledge, not being deeply rooted in Christ and without a pure acknowledgment of Christ's family of believers, will never serve the salvation of the believer himself or that of his fellow-believers! In a nutshell: the friction in the relationship between knowledge and love is dissolved in Christ alone!

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