

The dictionary defines the word arrogant as “self-important.” The arrogant person is one that has an undue opinion of his or her own importance. It is a human condition to be arrogant and no one is immune from the disease. Most of us have learned good manners and do not allow our feelings of self-importance to surface too much. Self-consciousness has many different symptoms. A person may feel constrained to talk about himself all the time or to talk about his opinions all the time. I suppose that theologians and ministers fall into the latter category, for they feel strongly about what they think and suppose that everyone should pay attention to their ideas.

One of my failings is not listening as I should. It is a certain form of arrogance, I know, and I try to overcome it, but I am not sure that I really think that what others say is important, or whether I am just trying to be polite. But maybe my pride is even in thinking this is important, that people care about what I think or not. It makes the mind whirl. Why should people care about what I think? Is it arrogant to pretend to be interested in order to make a good impression?

There is a certain arrogance about self-consciousness. Some people are so afraid of looking silly that they never say or do anything. They are afraid that everyone is looking at them. Other people are afraid that people are not looking at them, so try to claim center stage. I suppose that both of these are ways of being “self-important.”

There is a certain arrogance that goes along with ignorance. There is a certain prejudice against learning in some evangelical religious circles. I met a man recently who went to pains to let me know that the ministry he was with refused to accept seminary trained ministers, after he learned that I was with New Geneva. I am sure that he did not know how arrogant he appeared and how self-important.

But there is an arrogance, also, that goes along with knowledge. I do not know what kind of arrogance is the worst, but I suppose that the danger is when people in places of authority are filled with self-importance. This is the reason that the apostle tells us in another place that novices should not be ordained to office in the church, lest they be lifted up with pride, and fall into the condemnation of the devil, that is, into the same condemnation that the devil received, for the devil’s core transgression was pride, which led into rebellion against God, and he became a liar and a murderer.

The bible calls us to serve one another and even the knowledge that we have received is to be put to the use of the church, and not to our own advantage and elevation. But let us look at the text.

Vs. 1-3. Evidently Paul had been asked a question concerning eating things offered to idols. The question arose out of two considerations. Much of the ancient society was centered around idol worship, and it was accepted social practice to have meals in places associated with idols. To absent yourself from such meals was to be cut off from society. The second thing was this: most of the meat sold in the shops had previously been offered to idols. So there were two questions: participation in idol feasts, and whether or not the meat itself could be used.

All have knowledge. The Corinthians boasted in their knowledge and sophistication. Everyone knows something and it is human nature to be proud of what you know, be it ever so little. But Paul gently contrasts knowledge with love—love which looks out from oneself to the good of others. Knowledge that exists only to serve self is the kind that puffs up. The love of God is what counts. It is not what you know that counts, it is whether God knows you. To be known of God is far more important than to know God for what He thinks is far more important than what I think. Paul is putting the emphasis upon love, rather than knowledge. Everyone has knowledge, but not everyone has love.

Vs. 4-6. Paul lays down some principles. An idol is nothing in the world, because there is only one God, the true and living God. There are many things that are called God; there are sticks and stones, carvings, spirits, sun, moon, stars, devils, principalities, but none of these are true gods, for they are all creatures, created by the One true and living God for His Own purposes, and we are forbidden to give any worship to them, or to make images of them to worship.

In another place, I Cor. 10, Paul says this: 19-20 What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils

Although an idol is nothing, yet it is something to attend the sacrifices of idolatry for we must not have fellowship with devils. It is true that the idol is nothing, and the meat is nothing, but fellowship with the devil or devils is something, and it is wicked to be involved in such fellowship. There are those who might think that because an idol is nothing, it would be all right to attend the worship of idols. We will come back to this subject in Chapter 10.

It seems that the Corinthians were using a good principle in a wrong and arrogant way. It is true that there is but one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him. Perhaps Paul is even quoting the letter that they sent him, in which they justified their participation at idol feasts. Paul is saying, even granting the principle, you are still not doing right in participating at these feasts, for they are feasts dedicated to the worship of idols and you ought not to be there. Even granting that you are strong enough not to be contaminated in your souls, what you are doing will certainly be a snare to others.

Vs. 7. This knowledge is not in everyone. Every man does not have the same view of idols that you do. Even granting that your view of idols is correct—and Paul affirms that it is—you are still wrong, not to consider your brethren, that do not have this knowledge.

1. The bible says we are to walk circumspectly. In Ephesians 5:
 - 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.
 - 12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.
 - 13 But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.
 - 14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.
 - 15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,
 - 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
2. There is a fundamental principle regarding conscience. There is no such thing as a neutral act for a human being. If you do not act by faith, then it is sin. The just live by faith, and every act of our lives is to be an act of faith. Paul tells us in Romans 14:
 - 14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.
 - 15 But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.
 - 16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:
 - 17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.
 - 18 For he that in these things serveth Christ *is* acceptable to God, and approved of men.
 - 19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

- 20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence.
- 21 *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.
- 22 Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.
- 23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin.
3. It is wrong to seek to induce people to go against conscience. The Corinthians were guilty of two things: having fellowship with idols, and inducing people to go against conscience.

Vs. 8-10. The meat itself is nothing. It is the word or the idea that is connected to the meat that matters. If it be received with thanksgiving, then it is pure, Paul tells us in another place. Again, Paul is probably agreeing with something in the letter of the Corinthians. It is not that the meat is defiled, it is the circumstances under which it is eaten. Why should they go to the idol temple, sit down to eat, and thereby leave the impression that they are worshipping idols? Might this not be a great snare to many? How can we condemn the worship of idols when we participate in their assemblies?

Application: I will not go to mass in a Catholic church. It is not that I think that the wine is the body of Christ or the bread is His body. I do not think that there is something wrong with a candle. But my participation would leave the impression that such things are all right, and that it doesn't really matter what you do in worship. I will not participate in prayers to saints. You have to be very careful what message you send. This is Paul's meaning.

Vs. 11. Something needs to be said here. How can a weak brother perish, if he is predestined to eternal life? What does it matter what I do, won't the elect be saved? Once again, this is the arrogance of knowledge. How can the secret decree of God be used to excuse myself for a callous disregard of the well-being of my fellow Christian? The same wicked excuse has been given for not witnessing for Christ, or for not inviting people to come to church. I once had people say that we shouldn't use any advertising, even so much as a yellow-page listing, because won't those predestined come anyway? This is not faith, but a caricature of faith—not true knowledge, but a form of knowledge. How can I say I love God, if I do not love my neighbor?

Those who profess Christ are to be considered our brothers for whom Christ died, and are to be treated as such, not matter how weak they appear in our eyes. The sin of the strong is to despise the weak, Paul says, and the sin of the weak is to judge the strong. I should be able to confess my weakness without judging the strong, and I should be able to use my strength without despising the weak. We do not know the secret decree of God—we confess that there is such a decree and reprove those who would deny it, but we are not to live as if we could know the secret decree—the revealed will of God is that we show love and compassion to all men. For example, I may run a red light and cause the death of my neighbor. I cannot take solace in the fact that his death came by the secret and predestined will of God. The fact is true, but I still should have driving my car with the well-being of my neighbor in view. If this is true with regard to his physical health, how much more is it true with regard to spiritual health. Idolatry is a terrible disease, and those who practice it ought to be quarantined. This is Paul's meaning.

Vs. 12. “My brother to offend.” This is the same as cause him to stumble. The law of God prohibits us from casting a stumbling-block into the path of the blind, or to curse the deaf. We are to have compassion on those who are weak, just as God had compassion on us.

May God bless you.