

1 COR. 8:1-13 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN *AGEMO* FESTIVAL IN IJEBU-ODE, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the theological implications of 1 Corinthians 8:1–13 for Christian participation in the *Agemo* Festival, a culturally significant but religiously sensitive event among the Ijebu people of Ogun State, Nigeria. The research adopted a historical-critical method of hermeneutics, focusing on the Apostle Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church regarding food offered to idols. Through this lens, the study highlighted the ethical dilemma faced by Christians in navigating their cultural heritage while maintaining doctrinal integrity. Findings revealed that although some believers view traditional festivals like *Agemo* as harmless cultural expressions, others perceive them as religious activities that conflict with Christian beliefs. Paul's emphasis on love over knowledge, communal responsibility, and voluntary self-denial provides a framework for assessing Christian involvement in such festivals. The study concluded that Christian liberty must be guided by love and sensitivity to the conscience of others. It recommended among others that Christians should not participate in *Agemo* festival, as it is rarely possible for *Agemo* worshippers to participate in Christian festivals like Easter, Eucharist etc. without compromising their faith. This work contributes to the ongoing discourse on contextual theology and the intersection of Christianity and African traditional practices.

Keywords: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, *Agemo* Festival, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria

Introduction

Festivals are part and parcel of people's tradition and custom. While some are used to commemorate the worship of gods and the existence of monarchs, others are used to unite the sons and daughters of a particular town in order to preserve their long traditions (Anifowose, 2020). It is safe to say that Yoruba towns thrive on the existence of festivals, be it religious or social festival, as they are used to revive and solidify their cultural heritage. Mbiti proposes that the life of an African man would be full of uncertainties and emptiness without the emergence of festivals as they are instrumental to instilling values and beliefs in the society (Mbiti, 1991). Owusu-Frempon (2005) also remarked that African festivals serve as channels of cultural education through which peoples' cultural heritage is protected in order to pass it

down to future generations. Therefore, festivals can help preserve culture by transmitting it from one generation to another through cultural displays.

The Ijebu people are known for their participation in the Agemo festival, and this is evident in their eulogies, ... *Ijebu omo alare, omo awujale, omo arojo joye, omo alagemo ogun woyowoyo*. (Ayinde, 2011). It is a long-standing festival that has been in existence for years, and it is celebrated annually. The significance of Agemo festival among the Ijebu people is enormous as it deepens the people's identity, preserves tradition, promote intergroup relations and serves as a medium of spiritual cleansing and protection. However, its religious undertones through sacrificial offerings and rituals performances, present a theological and ethical problems for Christians who are indigenes of Ijebu. Meanwhile, Christians are taught to separate themselves from practices that may contaminate their spiritual life and faith, especially those that involve traditional practices and religious symbols (John 17:16). It becomes unbearable for some Christians to participate in local festivals, which may be detrimental to their Christian faith. This is where religion overlaps with culture, integrating religious practices with traditions and customs by adopting religious beliefs, rituals and values into social norms, which formed a blended system of practices.

As Christianity continues to grow among the Ijebu people, Christians are often faced with the challenge of integrating their religious convictions with cultural expressions. This tension between Christianity and culture is not new; it reflects early Christians' struggle in Corinth, as depicted in 1 Corinthians 8:1–13, where Paul addressed the problem of eating food sacrificed to idols. Paul admonished the Corinthians to desist from misusing their Christian liberty and exercising it with love and sensitivity, considering those whose faith could be compromised. This passage serves as a critical text for understanding how Christians today can respond to cultural practices with religious elements. Thus, this study sought to strike a balance between the Corinthian context and the contemporary situation in Ijebu-Ode. It examines Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 8:13 on foods sacrificed to idols and its emphasis on conscience, love, and responsibility over knowledge, with the aim to providing a theological framework for Christian engagement with the Agemo festival.

Research Problem

In recent times, the celebration of the Agemo festival in Ijebu-Ode has declined, as people no longer feel its strong presence unlike in the past when it was observed for a whole week. The impact of Agemo festival is mostly felt by women, who are traditionally exempted from its sacred rites and only participate during the cultural displays and merriment. Notably, the late *Awujale*, Oba Sikiru Kayode Adetona (the Paramount traditional ruler of Ijebuland, 1960-2025) once nullified the public procession aspect of the Agemo festival in Ijebu-Ode. This procession had previously attracted large crowds and promoted cultural identity. However, the cancellation of this public procession has contributed to a decline in both the festival's significance and the number of participants. In the past, the Agemo festival occasionally clashed with Christian worship, particularly when the festival fell on Sundays, disrupting church services. Beyond this, the interaction between Christianity and traditional festivals like Agemo has long been a subject of theological reflection and pastoral concern.

Several African scholars have addressed this intersection between faith and culture. For instance, Mbiti (1991) called for Christianity that is rooted in African cultural context to make a meaningful contribution to African people. On the contrary, Kato perceives a mixed Christian belief with traditional practices as unethical and dangerous to true Christian teachings (Ferdinando, 2007). Meanwhile, Bediako (1992) frowned at total rejection of African traditional practices instead proposed areas Christian faith can coexist when interpreted through the lens of the gospel. Furthermore, Ekine, Ajao, and Onaduja (2016)

examined the psycho-social effect of Agemo festival on school pupils in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. This present study fills the gap in literature by applying 1 Cor. 8:1-13 to the context of Christians participation in the Agemo festival in Ijebu-Ode, reflecting on the theological implications of Paul's teachings and providing insights into how Christians might engage with traditional cultural practices without compromising their faith.

Thus, the specific objectives of this study were to:

- (i) examine the traditional and religious background of the Agemo Festival in Ijebu-Ode;
- (ii) analyze 1 Corinthians 8:1–13 in its historical and theological context;
- (iii) investigate Christian responses to the Agemo Festival in Ijebu-Ode;
- (iv) draw out the implications of Paul's teachings for contemporary Christian practice in Ijebu-Ode.

Festivals among the Ijebu People

Although there are numerous festivals among the people like *Ebi/eibi*, *Igbe Olisa*, *Osu* among others (Ayandele, 1992). However, *Agemo* and *Ojude-Oba* festivals have received considerable attention due to their elaborate celebrations annually, yet, *Ojude-Oba* festival is widely celebrated. It is also important to note that there are only few works on *Agemo* festival unlike *Ojude-Oba* festival that has been flogged by different scholars. The rationale behind this review with focus on *Agemo* and *Ojude-Oba* festivals is just to provide the necessary context for *Agemo* festival and explores the sociocultural significance of these two festivals among the Ijebu.

There is no doubt that *Agemo* is highly admired by the people, and the common adage *Omo alagemo merindinlogun* can be linked to *Agemo* deity. The origin of *Agemo* festival has been linked to *Obatala*, who was *Agemo*'s father. *Agemo* lived a courageous life such that his followers continue to worship him (Ajala, 1995). History has it that *Agemo* and *Obatala* were at loggerheads over his marriage as *Obatala* disapproved of the marriage. Consequently, *Obatala* withdrew *Agemo*'s magical powers as a penalty for disobeying him. *Agemo* could not reinstate his body which led to his doom, which affected his public activity. In order to prevent his deformity in the public, he covered himself with mat and became a masquerade. This institutionalizes *Agemo* worship among the Ijebu traditional worshippers (Adeyeri, 2012). Thus, the *Agemo* festival particularly involved the ancestral worship of *Agemo* masquerades. These masquerades are believed to possess unique supernatural powers and serve as mediators between the people and the ancestors.

The *Ojude-Oba* festival is a cultural festival celebrated by all and sundry with no strict spiritual connection. Unlike the *Agemo* festival, it does not have any religious undertones. According to Oresile (2016), the *Ojude-Oba* festival is a unique traditional durbar held on the third day after *Eid-el-Kabir* and it is deeply valued by all sons and daughters of Ijebu. Fahm (2015) asserted that the *Ojude-Oba* festival has traditional, cultural, religious, social, and military significance. He further dates the festival back to the 90s and links it to *Balogun Kuku* who was one of the leading families that accepted Islam in the community. Babatunde (2007) also traced the festival to the Chief Imam, Imam Tunwatoba who took his friends and family members along with him to pay homage to the *Awujale* of the Ijebuland, *Oba Fidipote* who happened to be his friend on the *eid-l-adha* festival (Babatunde, 2007). Meanwhile, Oladunni (2022) links it to the emergence of Islam in Ijebu-Ode, reinforcing Fahm's position on the influence of *Balogun Kuku*, who played a key role in the acceptance of Islam in the Ijebu community. Olojede's work on the historical development of the *Ojude-Oba* festival relies heavily on Fahm's account, suggesting that Fahm's historical narrative is quite significant and credible (Olojede, 2025). While the *Ojude-Oba* festival serves as a platform

for the Ijebu people to pay homage to the *Awujale*, Agemo festival is used to worship and celebrate the Agemo deity.

From a theological perspective, there are various interpretations of 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 for the modern Christian community. The passage addresses the issue regarding food sacrificed to idols, highlighting the importance of love over knowledge within the church, which helps build unity within the church rather than focusing on knowledge, which can complicate issues. This particular text has been given scholarly attention, specifically from a theological viewpoint with reference to Christian conduct in pluralistic societies. Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 is a call for Christians to value love over knowledge (The Working Preacher Commentary, 2015). The commentary also emphasizes the importance of considering the consequences of one's actions and avoiding anything that may weaken another person's faith. Similarly, the Center for Excellence in Preaching (2018) posits that Christian freedom should be exercised with sensitivity to the beliefs and consciences of fellow believers. It further highlights the essence of Christian fellowship with reference to Christian ethics, evaluating individual actions based on their impact on the Christian community.

Spies (2017) argued that Paul uses his own personality to address the misuse of Christian liberty among the Corinthian Christian community, employing rhetorical criticism in his exegetical analysis. The work examines Paul's use of deliberative rhetoric in persuading the stronger Christians in Corinth to refrain from actions that could hinder the progress of the gospel. It, therefore, presents Paul's concept of Christian liberty in the context of evangelism and Christian conduct. The study further advocates for the adoption of Paul's approach to Christian liberty in contemporary Christian communities. All the above discussions provide a background for understanding how Christians can practice modesty within the framework of Christian and cultural beliefs. However, the application of these theological principles to festivals like the Agemo, particularly in the Nigerian context, has not been explored.

The existing literature offers various analyses of the Agemo festival's traditional dimensions and theological insights into 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of scholarly works on this particular study area that integrate both traditional festival and theological perspectives on Christian participation in cultural festivals like the Agemo festival among Christians in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. This gap in literature presents an opportunity for research that applies the theological principles of 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 to the context of the Agemo festival. Thus, this study explored how Christians can engage with their cultural heritage in Ijebu-Ode without denting their Christian image within the community of faith.

Methodology

The study employed the qualitative method of research since it focuses on Christian participation in Agemo festival, which cannot be measured using numerical values. Thus, it depended on secondary sources of data like textbooks, commentaries, journal articles and other literature books on Mediterranean culture. The study used historical-critical hermeneutical approach to analyze the text (1 Corinthians 8:1-13) and applied the text to the context of Christians in Ijebu-Ode regarding their participation in the Agemo festival. The reason for the adoption of historical-critical approach was to analyze the text itself in its original historical and theological context by employing various tools under the approach like historical, source, textual, literary and form criticisms before contextualizing it. Content analysis, as a method of data analysis under qualitative approach, was used to identify key

themes, content and phrases that carry meaning within the passage before inferences were drawn based on the findings of the study.

Analysis of I Cor. 8:1-13

Greek Text (Nestle-Aland) - Cor. 8:1-13

1 Περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, οἶδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γινώσκοντες ἔχομεν. ἡ γινώσκουσα φύσις, ἢ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ

2 τις δοκεῖ ἐγνωσκέναι τι, οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι

3 εἰ δὲ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ.

4 Περὶ τῆς βρώσεως οὖν τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, οἶδαμεν ὅτι οὐδὲν εἶδωλον ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ ὅτι οὐδεὶς θεὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς.

5 καὶ γὰρ εἴπερ εἰσὶν λεγόμενοι θεοὶ εἴτε ἐν οὐρανῷ εἴτε ἐπὶ γῆς, ὥσπερ εἰσὶν θεοὶ πολλοὶ καὶ κύριοι πολλοί,

6 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

7 Ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γινώσκουσα• τινὲς δὲ τῆ συνηθείᾳ ἕως ἄρτι τοῦ εἰδώλου ὡς εἰδωλόθυτον ἐσθίουσιν, καὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτῶν ἀσθενῆς οὕσα μολύνεται.

8 βρῶμα δὲ ἡμᾶς οὐ παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ οὔτε ἐὰν μὴ φάγωμεν ὑστερούμεθα, οὔτε ἐὰν φάγωμεν περισσεύομεν.

9 βλέπετε δὲ μὴ πως ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη πρόσκομμα γένηται τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν.

10 ἐὰν γὰρ τις ἴδῃ σὲ τὸν ἔχοντα γινῶσιν ἐν εἰδωλείῳ κατακείμενον, οὐχὶ ἡ συνείδησις αὐτοῦ ἀσθενοῦς ὄντος οἰκοδομηθήσεται εἰς τὸ τὰ εἰδωλόθυτα ἐσθίειν;

11 ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἀσθενῶν ἐν τῇ σῆ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν.

12 οὕτως δὲ ἀμαρτάνοντες εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τύπτοντες αὐτῶν τὴν συνείδησιν ἀσθενοῦσαν εἰς Χριστὸν ἀμαρτάνετε.

13 διόπερ εἰ βρῶμα σκανδαλίζει τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, οὐ μὴ φάγω κρέα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἵνα μὴ τὸν ἀδελφόν μου σκανδαλίσω

English Translation (Revised Standard Version) - Cor. 8:1-13

1 Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." "Knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up.

2 If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

3 But if one loves God, one is known by him.

4 Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one."

5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"

6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

7 However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

9 Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

10 For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?

11 And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.

12 Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

13 Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.

The first book of the Corinthians was written to address a Christian community in Corinth that was deeply influenced by Greco-Roman culture. Corinth was a wealthy, cosmopolitan city known for its immorality, boasting a population composed of Greeks, Romans, freedmen, and Jews. Paul wrote this letter to confront numerous issues troubling the church, including divisions, sexual immorality, and disputes over food offered to idols. Many scholars unanimously reached a consensus about the Pauline authorship regarding the first epistle of the Corinthians. As such, the book is widely accepted to be written by Paul the Apostle. Both internal and external evidences espouse Pauline authorship. The greeting in 1 Corinthians 1:1 introduces Paul as the writer, and the style and theological themes are consistent with his other epistles (Fee, 1987). Scholars equally agree that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians around A.D. 53–55 during his third missionary journey, likely from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8). This places the letter relatively early in the development of the New Testament canon (Fee, 1987).

The book of First Corinthians is pastoral, corrective, and theological. It deals with practical concerns of a Christian community struggling to live faithfully in a secular environment. Paul uses logic, rebuke, encouragement, and appeal to authority to address their challenges. The primary aim of 1 Corinthians is to correct doctrinal and moral errors in the Corinthian church. Paul wanted to restore unity, reaffirm apostolic teaching, and guide the believers in how to live out their faith in a pluralistic society. The letter was primarily written to the Christian community in Corinth, a diverse group including former pagans and Jews. They were converts living in a culturally permissive and idol-centered environment, which created confusion over ethical and theological boundaries.

Paul likely relied on oral reports from members of Chloe's household (1 Cor. 1:11) and a written letter from the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:1) asking questions. His responses were based on the teachings of Jesus, Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament), and Christian oral traditions. The letter is structured in a Greco-Roman epistolary format, beginning with a salutation, thanksgiving, and body. It makes use of rhetorical questions, chiasms, and legal argumentation. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul uses irony and contrast to correct the misuse of theological "knowledge." Theologically, the book emphasizes the unity of the Church, the lordship of Christ, the ethics of love, and the resurrection of the body. The book also emphasizes that knowledge must be guided by love (agape) and conscience must be respected.

Context is very important when analyzing a biblical text. Oderinde (2013) asserted that the interpretation of a text is contingent on the mindset and concerns of bookworms. This implies that there is no interpretation devoid of the interpreter's cultural background. It is most likely for one's background to creep in when interpreting texts. In respect to the text

under study (1 Cor. 8:1-13), Chapters 8 to 10 form a coherent unit in Paul's argument about food offered to idols. In Corinth, temples doubled as social spaces, and meat sacrificed to idols was often sold in the market or served at public events. The issue at hand was whether Christians could eat such food without violating their faith. 1 Corinthians 8:1–13 introduces the ethical tension between “the strong”—those who had knowledge that idols are nothing—and “the weak”—those whose conscience was defiled by idol associations.

Therefore, the passage (1 Corinthians 8:1–13) is structured as follows:

Verses 1–3: Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

Verses 4–6: The theological affirmation—idols are nothing; only one God and one Lord.

Verses 7–8: Not all possess this knowledge; eating food does not bring us closer to God.

Verses 9–11: Warning against using liberty to harm others.

Verse 12: Sinning against the weak is sinning against Christ.

Verse 13: Paul's personal resolution never to eat meat if it causes others to stumble.

Paul begins this section with a rhetorical contrast between knowledge (*gnōsis*) and love (*agapē*) – 1 Corinthians 8:1 (RSV) “Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” While some Corinthians knew that idols were not real, Paul warns that this kind of knowledge, when misapplied, leads to pride, whereas love edifies the community. In Greco-Roman setting such as Corinth, foods sacrificed to idols were commonly consumed in temple banquets, public feasts, or sold in marketplaces. For many new converts, especially from pagan backgrounds, this practice carried deep spiritual implications. Eating such food seemed like participation in idol worship, even if some believers theologically understood that “idols are nothing”. Paul addresses a conflict between theologically mature believers (the “strong”) and less mature ones (the “weak”) over whether it was acceptable to eat idol meat. This cultural dilemma closely parallels contemporary festivals like *Agemo* among the Ijebu, where ritual participation might conflict with Christian conscience.

V2-3 “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him.” Paul was against arrogance among the “knowing.” He suggests that genuine Christian knowledge is relational and rooted in love, not abstract logic. This is key to understanding Christian responsibility in a religiously plural society like Ijebu-Ode. Paul further affirms the monotheistic foundation of Christian theology:

... there is no God but one. For although there may be so-called gods... yet for us there is one God, the Father... and one Lord, Jesus Christ... (v 4–6, RSV). Despite this truth, Paul recognizes the spiritual sensitivity of some believers. He reaffirms core Christian belief in the Father and the Son, using Shema-like language (Deut. 6:4), reinterpreted Christologically—which would have stood in sharp contrast to polytheism. In the context of *Agemo* festival, Christians may assert that traditional gods are “nothing,” but this must be done discreetly without causing tension in such pluralistic society like that of Ijebu-Ode.

V-7 “However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.” (RSV). The “weak” believer, often a former idolater, may still associate sacrificial food with idolatry. For such individuals, consuming it violates their conscience. Paul introduces the concept of a weak conscience, a pivotal pastoral category. In V8 – “Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do”, Paul further makes no distinction to food, it neither enhances nor diminishes one's

relationship with God. But crucially, liberty must not override communal love. However, he warns the strong that their freedom must not lead others into sin. Participating in culturally controversial rituals (like eating idol meat—or attending Agemo rites) can cause spiritual harm to others. The principle is clear: Christian liberty ends where another's conscience is wounded. V9-11 “Take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak... and so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died” (RSV). The use of “destroyed” (ἀπόλλυται) intensifies the consequence—not physical death, but moral or spiritual downfall.

The ethical implication is weighty, harming a fellow believer is equivalent to harming Christ himself. The unity of the body of Christ demands communal responsibility in all cultural engagements. - V12 “Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.” In v13- “Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall” (RSV). Paul ends with a personal commitment to voluntary abstinence. He refrains not because the action is inherently sinful, but because of its tendency to destroy another people's faith. This exemplifies a radical ethic of love. Christians must be ready to surrender personal rights out of concern for others' faith—especially in pluralistic, tradition-rich societies like Ijebu-Ode.

Theological Implications for Christians in the Context of Agemo Festival in Ijebu-Ode

The Agemo is one of the most remarkable traditional festivals among the Ijebu, often associated with ancestral rites, masquerade displays, and cultural rituals. For many Christians, especially those rooted in indigenous communities, the festival presents a conflict between cultural identity and religious conviction. Paul's teaching that “knowledge puffs up but love builds up” (1 Cor. 8v.1) provides the framework for how Christians in Ijebu-Ode should approach cultural festivals like Agemo. Some Christians may claim superior theological understanding—believing that cultural festivals are harmless or empty of spiritual power—but Paul urges caution. Even if their theology is sound, it must be shaped by love for fellow believers who may stumble by their example. For instance, a Christian youth attending Agemo masquerade rites “just for fun” might unintentionally confuse or mislead new converts who are unsure about such participation. Love, not liberty, should guide action.

Paul also recognizes that believers are at different levels of maturity (v7- Not Everyone Has the Same Conscience). While some Christians in Ijebu-Ode might see the Agemo festival as cultural rather than religious, others—especially converts from traditional religion—may still view participation as a return to idol worship. Paul's instruction is to protect the conscience of the weak, avoiding actions that might confuse, offend, or spiritually endanger them. Therefore, church leaders must guide members by explaining the symbolic weight of cultural practices and encouraging discernment, rather than blanket condemnation or blind participation.

Participation in the Agemo festival, whether in dancing, drumming, or attending ritual events may not be inherently sinful. But if such actions become a stumbling block for other believers, it becomes morally problematic (Liberty Is Not a License to Harm Others vv. 9–11). For example, when a respected Christian elder participates in a masquerade parade, it may signal endorsement of the underlying spiritual rites to younger or weaker believers. In Paul's words, this could “destroy the brother for whom Christ died” (v.11). We must also note that some believers might be encouraged to imitate what they do not understand, simply because others do it (Cultural Participation Is Not Neutral vv. 10–12). Similarly, when Christians in Ijebu-Ode publicly engage in Agemo rituals, others may follow suite, not out of cultural appreciation, but out of confusion, thinking it is acceptable even when their

conscience condemns it. This opens the door to spiritual compromise and moral ambiguity. The implication is crystal clear: Christian actions within cultural spaces must be public testimonies of faith and love.

In V13 (Voluntary Self-Denial for the Sake of the Gospel), Paul concludes and provides a probable solution to the theological tension between one's cultural environment and religious conviction with his resolve: "If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again." In the context of Christian's participation in Agemo festival in Ijebu-Ode, this could be paraphrased: "If attending the Agemo Festival weakens my brother's faith, I will refrain from participating—no matter how harmless I believe it is." This principle encourages Christians in Ijebu-Ode to critically evaluate their participation, not simply by asking, "Is this sinful?" but "Does this build up the body of Christ?" Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 8 does not call for a total rejection of cultural festival like Agemo festival but demands sensitivity, humility, and love-driven engagement. Christians in Ijebu-Ode can respect and preserve culture, but not at the expense of compromising their faith or causing others to stumble. Hence, the Agemo Festival presents not just a cultural experience but a spiritual decision point. Churches must equip believers with sound biblical teaching, clear ethical guidelines, and pastoral wisdom for how to engage culture without undermining Christian witness.

Conclusion

This study has shown that cultural festivals, while important for social identity and heritage, must be evaluated carefully through the lens of Scripture. For Christians living in Ijebu-Ode, the Agemo festival presents both a cultural opportunity and a spiritual challenge. By applying Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 8:1–13, believers are called not to judge or boast in knowledge, but to respond with love, sensitivity, and moral responsibility. While not every cultural practice must be outrightly rejected, participation should never come at the expense of another believer's faith or the church's witness in society. Findings revealed that knowledge alone is not enough for decision-making in morally complex situations. Actions must be guided by love and concern for the conscience of others within the Christian community. As such, Christian participation in festivals like Agemo must be approached with wisdom, humility, and communal responsibility, rather than through judgment or legalism. Finally, the Christian life is not just about freedom, it is about serving others, honouring the will of Christ, and building up the community of faith. The Agemo festival becomes a test case for how to faithfully live out the gospel in the midst of culture.

Recommendations

1. Christians should not participate in Agemo festival, as it is rarely possible for Agemo worshippers to participate in Christian festivals like Easter, Eucharist etc. without compromising their faith.
2. Christians and Agemo worshippers represent two different religious identities that cannot be integrated into each other, both adherents should respect one another so as to promote religious tolerance.
3. Christians who cannot completely avoid the festival because of their position in the family or for other reasons may participate in certain aspects of the festival, particularly those without religious undertones.
4. Churches should encourage believers to uphold their faith without disregarding their cultural roots.

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