

Use our freedom to love others: 1 Corinthians 8v1-13

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[0 : 00] Read through all of it. Now, about food sacrificed to idols, we know that we all possess knowledge.

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing at all in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live.

And there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

But food does not bring us near to God. We are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

[1 : 23] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

When you sin against your brothers in this way, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Thank you, Connor.

And there's pens and notes being passed around if you'd like to take notes. And there's a sheet of paper as well. Just put up your hands and you can get one. And just by way of introduction this morning, Chapter 8 starts a new section in 1 Corinthians.

It brings us right to the very end of Chapter 10, which is all about how we use our freedoms, how we use our rights. Previously, from Chapters 5 through to 7, was all about how we conduct our relationships and our attitudes towards sex.

[2 : 49] And so this week is a new section, a new theme, about how we use our rights and our freedoms. And if you've missed any of the talks at all, you can find them on the church website.

You can listen back to them. And if you have any questions or anything you want to follow up from that, please do talk to me afterwards. Thanks, Connor.

Okay, well, let's pray. And we'll ask for God's help. Father, you have given us so much in our lives. Father, you've given us so much in our lives. You've given us so much in our lives. We give you thanks for that. You've given us minds to understand, to be able to read.

And Father, we need your continued help in our lives, that what we listen to and what we read from your word, we would have understanding not just in our heads, but that it would travel deep into our hearts, to the very core of our being, so that it changes us, so that we become more like you.

[4 : 46] So, Father, please help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, from now on, you can't eat out.

That means you can't go to any restaurants or hotels, no more McDonald's, Pizza Hut, or Dino's. If you get invited to a wedding, well, you can't attend because food will be served.

If your friends are meeting up for a Christmas dinner, you'll just have to politely decline. There's a new rule for the church, no more eating out.

Well, that might seem very strange to us, but not if you were a member of Corinth Community Church. Have a look at verse 1 of chapter 8.

Now, about food sacrificed to idols. And in particular, look at verse 4. So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols.

[6 : 09] You see, temples and shrines in Corinth were as common as restaurants and takeaway in Cork. In fact, they had a double purpose. Not only were they the places where you made your sacrifices and where you said your prayers, it was also the place where you ate your food.

So if there was a birthday celebration, well, then you'd all head off to the local temple, which served at your local restaurant. First, you would make your sacrifice to seek the blessings of the gods, that you'd have a good future.

What was left from your sacrifice would then be served up to everybody to enjoy. So if you brought a chicken along for the sacrifice, well, then there was a good chance that Chicken Maryland would be on the menu.

Or if you fancied a night in and a takeaway, well, you'd head down to the local shrine. Perhaps you'd bring a fish to appease the gods, say your prayers and place your order.

And if you brought a fish, well, the chances are you'd be going home with crispy cod and chips. So we can begin to see how difficult it was to be a Christian in Corinth.

[7 : 31] Because eating out meant eating food that was used in some kind of pagan sacrifice or ritual. And it was having an effect on the church family.

There were some in the church family who were saying, you can't eat out. It's wrong. This is food that's been sacrificed to an idol. But others in the church were saying, we can eat what we're like. We're free. We belong to God. Idols don't mean anything to us. So we can eat what we like. Look at verse 7. But not everybody knows this.

Not everybody knows that we're free. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food, they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol.

And since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God. We are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do.

[8 : 42] So you see, there was a section within the church family that were saying to everybody, if I want to go to the temple for dinner with my colleagues, that's fine. If I want a kebab at the local shrine, who cares?

We're free in Christ. Now the question we have to ask ourselves is, are we free to do what we like? You see, eating food in the local restaurant mightn't be a problem in an Irish context. But there are those who, as there were in Corinth, will say, but you see, Johnny, I'm a Christian now.

So I'm free to do what I like so long as I do not disobey God's words. So if I want to go to the pub at the weekend for a pint, well, I'm free to do so.

If I want to meet my college mates and go to the nightclub, well, I can. If I want to play a match on Sunday morning instead of going to church, I will.

[9 : 58] If I want to spend my money on the latest iPhone or the latest fashion designer jumper, well, that's fine for me. If I want to allow my children to go trick-or-treating, that's not a problem.

If I want to go to yoga classes, read Harry Potter, watch movies that are 18, play poker, you see, I'm a Christian and I've been set free.

Now, I wonder what you think about the list that I read out. You see, none of those things mentioned bring us near to God.

Have a look at verse 8. He says, food does not bring us near to God. So, we're no worse if we do go to the pub or the nightclub or read Harry Potter or go to yoga classes.

It doesn't matter if I do or if I don't. These things don't save us. They don't make me a Christian. I'm free so I can do what I like.

[11 : 10] But, look at verse 9. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

Verse 13. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin or if my attitudes or actions to a certain thing cause somebody else to fall into sin, I will never do that again so that I will not cause them to fall.

Do you see, our Christian life is not a private individual exercise. The choices and decisions that I make about my life have a profound effect on other people.

Likewise, yours to them. So the places I go and the things that you do can cause another believer to fall into sin.

Have you ever considered that? So if I am a Christian, I will take seriously my choices and my decisions.

[12:32] Yes, we are free, but we must use our freedom to love others. First, let's look at this in more detail.

We are set free by the gospel. Look at verse 1. Now about food, sacrifice to idols.

We know that we all possess knowledge. Now that knowledge he's talking about there is an understanding of the gospel. So he's saying to the church, look, you know who God is.

We know what God has done. In fact, we are reminded of the gospel we do know. Look down at verse 4.

The gospel tells us there is only one God. So verse 4, so then eating food, sacrifice to idols, we know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

[13:39] Now that's a very basic understanding of the gospel. There are no other gods. Of course there are idols that represent gods.

Look at verse 5. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth as indeed there are many gods and many lords and you would be saying why don't you look around in Corinth? They're all over the place. But in reality he's saying they're not gods. Keep your finger there in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and go back to Psalm 115.

Psalm 115. Somewhere to the left of the centre of the Bible.

Psalm 115 verse 2. So do you see what it says?

[14:47] Psalm 115 verse 2. Why do the nations say where is their God? Well our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases him.

but their idols are silver and gold made by the hands of men. They have mouths but they cannot speak.

They have eyes but they cannot see. They have ears but they can't hear. They have noses but they cannot smell.

They have hands but they cannot feel. Feet but they can't walk. nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them and so will all who trust in them.

You see in reality they are not gods. There is only one true God. Go back to 1 Corinthians 8.

[15:53] Now we might not be bowing down to a gold sculpted Buddha and we might not be praying to a wooden carved Vishnu but we can all have our own gods and we can turn people and things into gods.

So instead of trusting the one true God we look to people and we look to things for our joy and our peace and our security. But the gods that we make are like the gods that we've just read about in Psalm 115 that they'll disappoint you.

The gods of our making can never save us. They only enslave us. We only end up serving those gods. They can never change your life and transform you.

They will only destroy your life and take things from you. There is only one God who can save. God who is this God?

Well, as we read on in verse 6, he is the father who gives life. Look at verse 6. Yet for us there is but one God, the father from whom all things came and for whom we live.

[17:16] So our God is the creator God of all of life. the winds and the rains of hurricane Desmond that we've been experiencing. God is the creator and the ruler of all that happens.

He sustains all things and he provides for all things. There is no life outside of God. But this God is not distant and removed and uninterested.

Do you see what it says in verse 6? He is the father. So this is a God we can know personally. relationally and intimately.

He is the father God unlike the idols that we read about who loves us and who can speak to us through his word. Who listens to us when we cry out to him and who answers us when we call out to him.

He is the God who not only made the universe but actually came as a person and walked on planet earth. God is the God who gives life.

[18:22] He is the son who redeems life. Look at the rest of verse 6. And there is but one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we live.

God came to us in a person in the person of Jesus Christ. He came so that we could know him. But remember the reason why he came.

It came for a purpose. Jesus came to redeem us. Look what it says in verse 6. The one through whom we live. He is the one who gives us true life.

He redeems us from the emptiness and the hopelessness of our false gods and our made up religions. The ones that we seek to try and perform to.

Christ sets us free from all of that. He alone is the one who saves us. He alone is the one who will satisfy us completely. This is the gospel that we know to be true.

[19:29] God sets us free from the gods of our own making which can never save us. And he brings us into a relationship with God the Father who is the source of all life who speaks to us, who talks to us, and who listens to us.

So because of my trust in this God, I have been set free. So I'm free to do as I please, so long as I do not disobey God's word.

I'm no longer trying to perform by my actions and by the things I say. I've been accepted by Christ. So we are free to do what we like, aren't we?

Well, not exactly. We are free by the gospel, but we've been set free for a purpose, set free to love. You see, the sign or the evidence that we have been set free by the gospel is we will love others.

So if you're here this morning, you're wondering, have I been set free?

[20:45] Well, the evidence will be love in your life. Look at chapter 8, verse 1. Now about food sacrificed to idols, we know that we all possess knowledge.

So he says, we know about the gospel, we know what it's all about, but here's the catch, knowledge about something is not enough.

Look at the rest of verse 1. Because knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The person thinks he knows something, does not yet know as he ought to know.

Do you see, knowing God intellectually is not the same as knowing God relationally. I can know all about God.

I can explain who the Father is. I can tell you perfectly clearly what Jesus did, but never believe and trust God. I could have a degree and a PhD in theology, but never be changed and transformed by that knowledge.

[21:58] You see, to know about God, to know about the scriptures, to have all the knowledge and understanding of what the Bible has to say, is not the same as being known by God.

Look at verse 3. But the man who loves God is known by God. to be known by God is to trust him, is to live in that vibrant relationship with God, to know him personally.

So the sign that I truly know God, the evidence that I have been set free by the gospel is that I am in a vibrant living relationship with God and the outworkings of that is I will be loving other people.

You see, knowledge by itself is destructive. All knowledge does is puff up. Do you see what it says in verse 1? Knowledge puffs up.

Now we're not anti-knowledge. Knowledge is good. We encourage people to go to NBC. We encourage people to come on Wednesdays and Sundays to learn in our understanding of who God is.

[23:12] But if all that understanding is just giving us information and clever arguments, then it's nothing. All it will do is puff you up.

You'll just wander around with a great big head going look at all these things that I know. You see, with that knowledge, I might be able to explain to somebody why I can drink and smoke and go to yoga classes and how the Bible talks about those things.

None of those things actually contradict God's words, so I'm free to do them. But that's just knowledge of the head, isn't it? It's not taking other people into consideration and how my actions may affect other people.

It's a knowledge that does not love. Knowledge just simply puffs up. Instead of knowledge puffing up, we want love that builds up.

That's what the rest of verse 1 says, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. You see, if we know God relationally, if the gospel has set me free, then I will use my knowledge to build other people up.

[24 : 30] In other words, I will seek to help people understand and apply the gospel to their lives and try and help them work through what the scripture says about a certain matter. other. But I will be also taking into consideration how my choices and how my decisions will affect another person.

So instead of thinking, oh, the gospel has freed me, I can do what I want, I will see that the gospel actually frees me to love what is best for other people.

My choices and decisions are not about me, but how I can build other people up. So what does all this look like in practice?

Yes, we've been set free by the gospel, but that gospel sets us free to intentionally love others, to look out for them.

So what will it look like in practice? Well, third, we're set free to protect the weak. So we need to understand who is the weak person among us.

[25 : 44] First, our weaker brother or sister. Look at verse nine. So he says, be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

Well, who are the weak that that's being talked about? Well, read on, verse 10. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened or encouraged to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

them. So, do you see how our actions and our behaviours can affect other people? We could imagine two Christians in the church in Corinth.

We'll call them Lucas and Stephanas. And Lucas gives Stephanas an invite saying, I'll meet you down at the local shrine for a burger. Well, Stephanas has been a Christian for a long time.

On the other hand, Lucas not, and he's kind of a bit cautious about going down to the local shrine because the last time he was down there he was offering food to his God. He says, I can't go.

[27 : 11] I think it will give the wrong impression to people. The other one gets a bit annoyed. He says, come on, we're not sacrificing, we're just having a bit of food together. What's the big deal?

Don't be so boring. Don't you know that you've been saved by grace? These idols aren't real anyway. And after much persuasion and against his conscience, he gives in and he goes along with his friends.

Three weeks later, Lucas is horrified to discover that Stephanas is no longer going to church, but he's back sacrificing to his idols.

Look at verse 11. So this weak brother for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge.

Now that's really serious, isn't it? We may have knowledge and understanding about the grace of God and all that he's done for us and how he set us free, but if we use that knowledge in a wrong way to upset somebody who hasn't quite understood the gospel of freedom, that's a serious matter.

[28 : 30] Let me give a few examples. The lads from church are all heading into town to celebrate the end of their Christmas exams. They persuade Gary, he's a new guy at the CU, to go along with them.

They've had a great night out. The problem is, well, Gary stopped going to the CU. He's back in drinking with his buddies. The girls have decided to go for a night out to the nightclub, just for a bit of Christmas crack.

Some are a bit reluctant and not so sure, but after a little bit of peer pressure, come on, it's just this once they all decide to go. The problem is, Sharon, who really didn't want to go in the first place, feels really guilty about going and has stopped reading her Bible and is struggling.

So, can we begin to see how our choices and decisions have a profound effect on our brothers and sisters in Christ? Using our freedom in Christ can actually destroy my family in Christ.

It's a serious matter. We need to love the weak, not destroy the weak. Look at verse 12.

[30 : 00] When you sin against your brothers and sisters in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

You see, while going to the pub might not be wrong, while going to a night club might not be against God's word, but if by my choices and decisions I cause another believer to go against their conscience, it is sinful.

It says in verse 12 that we actually sin against Christ. Christ. So let's try and work this through in a few more applications. If I go to play a match on a Sunday, or spend my morning studying for exams instead of going to church because I'm free, if I attend the local yoga class, or if I decide to watch an 18 plus movie, or if I decide that we can serve meal at dinner time in our home, if by my attitude and my actions I encourage somebody else to do the same, and that causes them to go

against their conscience, we are in effect causing them to go against Christ.

If I feel that I can be involved in this church, and well I'm a Christian and I'm free and I can go and attend other churches when I like, if by my actions I cause others to do the same and it goes against their conscience, rather than building them up in their faith, I'm actually tripping them up in their faith.

All our choices and all our decisions that we make have a profound effect on the family of believers. verse 13, therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

[32 : 22] Instead of saying, yes, I can do this, or my conscience allows me to do that, I will learn to say no because I do not want to cause my brother or sister to sin and to fall.

You see, the church is not about me and my private individual choice and what I'm free to do whenever I like. Church is a family and we do what's best for the family.

We make choices and decisions about not how is it going to help me, but how is it going to help the other person. And those who know the freedom of the gospel, those who have been truly changed and transformed by God's grace, will be incredibly free.

But that freedom is always used to serve others and to build each other up in love.

Therefore, look at verse 13. If what I do or if what I say causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never do those things again so that I will not cause them to fall.

[33 : 49] We have been set free in Christ, but we use our freedom to build each other up in love. Let's pray together.

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