

1 Corinthians 8

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[0 : 00] Our New Testament lesson today is from 1 Corinthians 8. Now concerning food offered to idols, we know this, that all of us possess knowledge.

This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. Therefore, 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.

For although there may be many so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom we are all things and through whom we exist.

However, not all possess this knowledge, but some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience being weak is defiled.

[1 : 17] Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat it, no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in idols' temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.

Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. This is the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Gospel reading today is from Matthew 18, 1-6.

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And calling to Him a child, He put them in the midst of them and said, Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

[2 : 40] Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

This is the Gospel of our Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ. You may be seated. Good morning.

I invite you to turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 8. That's what we'll be taking a look at this morning. 1 Corinthians chapter 8.

In the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul's letter to a young church with a lot of questions.

Good questions. Questions where they are wrestling with what it means to be Christians in a society not unlike our own. We saw back in the first few chapters from about mid-chapter 1 to chapter 4 that Paul confronted the problem of a church that had connected power and wealth and worldly wisdom and lofty rhetoric and had made that to be the sort of pinnacle of Christian faith.

[4 : 15] And he pointed them back to Christ who sacrificed himself who came in humility. He, Paul, talked to them like a father would talk to children.

Sometimes encouraging them to keep trying. Sometimes, I think, disappointed as only a father can be disappointed. Sometimes outright frustrated because the Corinthians had stunted growth.

They were not as mature as they should have been. This gave way to a series of questions they were asking, sensible questions in chapters 5 to 7.

You know, what does it mean to be a Christian in this pagan context? You know, I became a Christian. My spouse was not a Christian, so should I get divorced?

Now that I'm a Christian, that, okay. I was single when I became a Christian. Does this mean I need to get married now to fulfill my Christian faith? What is marriage even supposed to look like now that we're all Christians?

[5 : 26] I think all of these, again, sensible questions for young Christians in Corinth. Paul's word to them, remain as you were when you were called.

Remain. Remain in God, is what he says. Remain in God. Resist the devil. Don't give yourself to a low view of marriage. Don't give in to the temptation to sexual immorality.

Remain in God. So we turn to a new section here, chapter 8. It's actually going to take us through at least chapter 10. You'll see there in the first verse, now concerning, shifts the topic.

Now concerning food offered to idols. He introduces a section that's going to wrestle with the idea of rights, liberty, freedom.

What am I entitled to as a new Christian? And balancing that with restraint. The conscience of yourself and of others.

[6 : 32] And what it means to restrain your own freedom. And this is going to take him for a few chapters. And as we've seen him do several times, he introduces this longer discussion with a test case.

And the test case in 8.1, food offered to idols. He brings it up. This is the central issue. Food offered to idols. But he goes on to address a seemingly unrelated issue first.

He begins by laying out a principle in the first few verses. All of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up.

But love builds up. That's the principle. Love is much more important than the expression of knowledge. They were fully enriched in knowledge.

They were, you know, remember back to chapter 1. They were not lacking any gift. And one of the things he actually mentions there is they were enriched in knowledge. It's 1.5-7. But knowledge alone is a dangerous foundation.

[7 : 35] He says it's like being puffed up. It's building a house on a foundation of air. One nail hole later and the whole thing comes crumbling down. The hot air dissipates.

Because knowledge puffs up. Love is a much surer foundation. It actually builds up. That's his comparison for love and knowledge.

And he lays this out by showing the weakness of a focus on knowledge. Look at verse 2. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. These are good words for a context such as ours where intellectual elitism rules the day.

Yeah. Try to know everything. Go ahead. Not going to happen. Sure. Pursue all of knowledge. That went really well for us back in the garden.

[8 : 39] Remember that? We have a rocky history with pursuing all knowledge. And so he turns to not just the incompleteness of knowledge, but he says, and it's not even your knowledge that matters that much.

Look at verse 3 again. If anyone loves God, he is known by God. Rather than pursue knowledge alone, why don't you try love?

And I think it's implicit here because he's going to get to this over the next three chapters. It's not just the first commandment, love God. I think the second commandment there is hiding in the wings. And love your neighbor as yourself.

But it's that love that makes you known by God. That's his principle to open up this discussion about foods offered to idols.

And so he continues. And he continues again with a second principle or really sort of a starting point of knowledge in verses 4 to 6. Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, okay, he's come back to the central issue, we know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one for although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

[10 : 14] He doesn't quite get to the eating problem yet. He stops for a moment on this idea of there is one God. We know this.

Of course we know this. This makes sense. We've been saying this back since Deuteronomy 6 and the Shema, right? There is only one God. It's monotheism 101. Sure. There is one God.

So what is the problem if we all know that there is one God? Well, and this is where he gets to the problem.

Verses 7 to 12. Paul arrives. However, not all possess this knowledge. There it is. Some people are coming from paganism.

They are converting to Christianity and they're not yet there on monotheism 101. He continues, Food will not commend us to God.

[11 : 14] We are no worse off if we do not eat and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge, there's that knowledge word again, eating in an idol's temple, he will not be encouraged.

I'm sorry. Will he not be encouraged if his conscience is weak to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.

Thus sinning against your brothers and wounding their consciences when it is weak, you sin against Christ. So what exactly is going on here?

A little background might help. Food in the first century was offered to idols as a way of offering them to a god. It would be very common in Corinthian culture for this to happen.

It happened in sort of three different ways. There would be a public feast at the local temple. So food would be offered to an idol there that is offered to a god there.

[12 : 18] And then there would be a feast because the gods, not being very hungry usually, you know, given that they don't actually exist, didn't actually eat the food that was offered to them. So there would be a feast for everyone to participate in.

That's option number one. Option number two, there would be private sacrifices in people's homes. Wandering about your day in Corinth and your boss invites you over for dinner. And before dinner, he offers a prayer to Poseidon.

And Poseidon is supposed to, you know, bless you as a result of offering this food to him. And then you eat the food that you offered. That's option number two. Option number three, because, again, the gods were not usually very hungry, being as that they don't really exist, all of that food for particularly innovative people made its way to the market.

A few bucks were made from it. So as a new Christian in Corinth, you've got these social problems and you've got these grocery shopping problems, right? Do I know where this meat came from?

Am I going to participate in the public feast? Am I going to actually go and have dinner with this person, knowing that all of this idolatry is waiting in the wings? What were they supposed to do?

[13 : 35] Well, for some, the knowledge that those gods don't really exist was freeing. It meant, sure, let's have lamb chops.

Let's go have roast at our boss's house. Why not? It's not like Poseidon really exists. But for others, the transition was much slower.

Their consciences were tender. For them, it represented walking backward into the idolatry that they'd left. And this gets to the central issue.

At the heart of this issue is the fact that freedom to eat meat offered to idols, that is, freedom and syncretism are indistinguishable.

Freedom and syncretism look exactly the same. This is an issue for us on a number of fronts.

[14 : 38] It's not just the old fundamentalist issues of drinking alcohol, smoking cigars, playing cards, and dancing. And, I mean, those are real issues for us.

I mean, I can't tell you how many times I've taken the position of philosophical enlightenment or intellectual elitism over the fundamentalists. And that's something we've got to wrestle with.

But it's other things, too. I was in India in January a few months ago. And I was talking to some locals in Delhi and there had been some other American missionaries there before us and they were talking about how there's this very popular thing in the United States where Christians even would go and practice yoga.

Now, for a lot of American Christians, yoga is a form of exercise. It's not, you know, one of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy and religion. It's not a spiritual activity.

But for the Indians, that was, like, mind-blowing. How is it, I mean, how is it that those people still consider themselves to be orthodox Christians if they're practicing yoga? Makes sense.

[15 : 48] I mean, it's a good question. And when you're around those Indians in Delhi, it changes how you talk about things like yoga. It changes whether you go have your morning meditation doing yoga.

Another one. My wife came out of Roman Catholicism. For a long time, she struggled with the liturgy that we use in this service because some of it smacks of Roman Catholicism.

And for her, early on, it represented tracking backward into a false Christianity. Christianity. So what are we to do?

Paul holds himself up as an example in verse 13. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble.

He will elaborate on this answer in the next couple of chapters. But it pushes us back to that opening principle. love over knowledge. Restraint over freedom.

[17 : 04] Paul would rather be a vegetarian than take a chance that he's going to cause his brother to stumble. My knowledge-fueled freedom is lacking in the love of my brother.

If it is indiscriminately causing him to stumble, then I need to choose restraint just like Paul did. It's not just his conscience that is at stake.

It's not just my brother's conscience that is at stake. Remember verse 12. I'm actually sinning against Christ, who is himself the very example of restraint in the service of others.

He gave up his seat in heaven to come to earth. He restrained his very divinity to show us a way. He gave up his life that ours might be saved.

What does it say about us if we can't give up simple earthly freedoms for the sake of our brother? Thanks be to God that Jesus saved us.

[18 : 10] Let me pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for sending your son, your son who emptied himself of so much in order to save us.

Give us the wisdom and the love to restrain ourselves, to give up freedom for the sake of others, and to do so out of a genuine love for you.

I pray this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

You know, the Nicene Creed is a wonderful expression concerning the one God who had all rights and yet revealed himself to us in such a way that his son lives with all restraint that we might have salvation.

And in light of that, I'm just going to ask you to stand and let us together with that word that has been preached on our hearts, may it now be affirmed by our voice.

[19 : 31] Christian, what do you believe? We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man.

For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

[20 : 37] With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy, Catholic, and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.