

# "This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up"

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[0:00] The words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.! Please be seated.

And if you will, pick up your Bible and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 8.! It's on page 1136 of your pew Bible. So, we are resuming this morning our series through this wonderful epistle.

I've been taking a break during Advent and Christmas. And if you were not here when we started this series in the summer, the sermons are recorded, most of it, 95% of them.

90% of them are recorded and available on the church's website. We had some recording issues, so I think two sermons are missing. So, you can go on the church website and follow and listen to the previous sermons there.

If you remember, through our time so far in this letter, we said the church in Corinth is a blessed church.

[1:18] They're a church full of spiritual gifts. But it's also a church under duress with problems.

The problem is that they see the world through worldly lenses rather than through gospel ones.

Because of this, for all their giftings and for all their knowledge, they were immature.

That's Apostle Paul's conclusion, verdict concerning them. They were divisive. They were self-absorbed. The worldly lens through which they operate is like wearing drum goggles and trying to walk a straight line.

That's the analogy we gave concerning them. They were seeing. They were navigating the world through worldly lens.

And so, because of that, they can navigate rightly. They were relying on the world's wisdom rather than relying on God's wisdom, which was available to them through the Holy Spirit.

[2:33] So, that's the presenting issue and problem in the church in Corinth. And now we come to chapter 8, where Paul addresses a different point of controversy among them.

Now, the presenting issue in chapter 8, in this chapter, is about food offered to idols. And immediately, that statement, food offered to idols, might seem so foreign to many of us.

Especially if we're Westerners. Either by birth or by upbringing. Now, I'm Nigerian by birth. And for many others, like me, who grew up in Africa or in Asia, or have that kind of upbringing, they were probably more aware and familiar with the notion of food offered to pagan gods.

Such a notion is not so foreign. Either to ancestors. Ancestors' worship. Or to sort of animus gods. Remember that we said of Corinth that it is a great metropolis.

It's a big city. And it's a city at the center of commerce and travel in its day. And also, it's a city in which, if there is a god in the pantheon of deities of the first century world, that god is likely known and worshipped in Corinth.

[4:09] And so, what does this have to do then with food and eating? You might be wondering. Now, imagine for a second, the presenting issue here.

Imagine for a second, you, in the 21st century, were transported to first century Corinth. Imagine you're sitting down at a restaurant, and the menu is ended to you.

And you ask the question, the socially conscious question that a 21st century person might ask. Is your beef ethically sourced?

Have you ever been to a restaurant and people ask that? Can you tell me the source of your vegetables or your beef or your chicken? You know, that's a 20th century question. Imagine asking that at a restaurant in Corinth.

By the way, the restaurant is probably in the temple, likely. Or even if it isn't, if it's just in the marketplace. Imagine asking that. Well, you're in first century Corinth.

[5:16] And the waiter probably would give you a weird look. As if to say, what world did you come from? But then he might grudgingly answer your question. But this is how he would answer it.

Well, we get our meat from the temple of Aphrodite. They have the best beef and mutton in all of Corinth. And we get our poultry from the temple of Serapis.

They have the best game birds in the city. Now, that's not the grass-fed, free-range, cruelty-free jargon your 21st century ears want to hear.

But you might let them at a rest. But maybe your Corinthian friend will explain to you why he's answered that way. Because in Corinth, almost all the meat that is available for food is first sacrificed to idols in its many different temples.

And now, after the animal is sacrificed, a third is burned up. A third goes to the temple.

[6:29] And a third goes to you, who have brought the animal to be sacrificed, to use as a feast. To feast on with your friends. To have a party. Either at the temple party room, or to take home with you.

And to eat it at home. But what happens to the third that is left at the temple? Now, if everybody brings animals to be sacrificed, that's more meat than they need.

The priest will need. So, that third that goes to the temple is now sold to different meat markets. And so, even the meat you buy when you go to the grocery store is from animals that have been sacrificed to idols.

So, do you understand now that issue in a place like Corinth, if you're a Christian? And so, when Paul says in verse 1, Now, concerning food offered to idols, it is in reference to this reality.

Some in the Corinthian church could not tolerate meat that has been sacrificed to idols. But those who wrote Paul, because Paul is responding to a letter they wrote to him.

[7:43] Those who wrote Paul, they possess knowledge. The knowledge about the true nature of idols. And what is that? To which Paul actually agrees with them in verse 4.

We know that an idol has no real existence. And that there is no God but one. So, they know this. These people know this. And knowing this, having this knowledge, they are free to enjoy a good steak. If they so choose.

They have the freedom to eat whatever meat is before them. Because they know the idol is nothing. It has no existence. And they stand upon their right in their letter to Paul.

And perhaps they are hoping that Paul will write back to the weak brothers, who seem to be bothered by meat sacrificed to idols, to educate them.

[8:42] And so, Paul does write back to them. And he says, We know that all of us possess knowledge. Again, this thing about knowledge.

Well, we know that all of us possess knowledge. Paul does not dispute. Notice that. Paul does not dispute their knowledge concerning this matter. But he wants them to see that knowledge by itself pops up.

Whereas, love builds up. So, Paul says to them, Yes, you have the knowledge of this matter correctly.

But all the knowledge you have about this has done for you is inflated you like a balloon. And like a balloon, you're floating high above those whom you perceive as weak.

You're looking down at them. You're looking down on them. But what you don't see is that you're in fact full of empty hair. Knowledge puffs up.

[9:47] But love builds up. You think you know something. Paul says to them. But you do not know as you ought to know.

The thing is that the Christian is never, ever, at the end of knowing and learning about God's truth. These people think, Oh, we know it all. We know that. And we can just then move on from that.

Move on based on that knowledge. But Paul is trying to express, to tell them, the Christian is never at the end of knowing.

We're constantly knowing and learning about God's truth. And in fact, true godly knowledge should humble us rather than inflate us.

True godly knowledge makes us to see the depth of our sin. The depth of our depravity. And helps us to see the greatness of God's mercy and grace in saving us and making us his own.

[10:54] That's what true godly knowledge does. But when knowledge about God, when your knowledge about the Bible doesn't lead to worship, when it doesn't lead to an increasing love for God, all you have then instead is a false sense of self-importance.

Because your knowledge becomes self-serving, self-focused, self-deceiving even. Hence, the word that Paul uses, you become puffed up.

And Paul is saying to them in verse 3 there, true knowledge leads to what? It leads to love for God. And that's what actually matters to God.

It is those who, upon learning about God, through the hearing of his word, come to love him. They are the ones whom God knows.

God doesn't know you because you have a PhD in New Testament theology. Or you're the, you know, big pumba of, you know, some seminary somewhere.

[12:09] or you're the pastor of a particular church. That's not what makes you known by God. It's not your knowledge ultimately. It is how you put that knowledge into action in loving God and loving the brothers.

And so that's what Paul is impressing on them here in verse 3. And remember the words of Jesus in his parable. many will say to him, that is to Jesus, when they see him on that day, on the judgment day, many will say, but I went to church.

I taught the Bible class. I preached. I know the complexities of the heads of doctrine of the church.

Yet God will say to them on that day, depart from me, you walker of iniquity. I do not know you.

It's a sobering thought, isn't it? What makes us known to God is not our knowledge. It is our love put into action in loving God and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

[13:26] I'm reminded of 1 John, which we went through last year. 1 John 4, verse 7 and 8.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. God is so it's not that knowledge is of no use.

That's not what Paul is trying to say. He's not saying that all Christians should just chuck your Bible.

You don't have to read it. You don't have to learn about God. That's not at all what Paul is saying.

In fact, Paul wants you to grow in the knowledge of God. That's often his prayer to the churches.

Knowledge that serves love.

This is true of our relationship, isn't it? If you love something, you naturally seek to grow in its knowledge.

[14:38] Imagine for a moment a man asking a woman to marry him, but he can't tell you the woman's last name. He doesn't know her birthday.

He doesn't know what she likes or what she dislikes. You would sensibly conclude that this man doesn't really love this woman.

Why? Because he doesn't know her. How could you love that which you do not know? So knowledge is in fact essential to love.

But knowledge for its own sake is useless. And often it can become divisive.

And so that's what Paul is warning the Corinthians about in this chapter. And Paul further clarifies this view of knowledge in verse 4-6.

[15:41] He says knowledge of God must lead to a fundamental change. Knowledge of God must lead to a fundamental change in your life.

Otherwise it's useless knowledge. And Paul again agrees with them on the principle. Note there.

We know as he writes to them we know we all know guys that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one.

Paul affirms their claim about the futility of idols that they are nothing. Paul remembers Apocot 2 18 and 19 which reminds us what uses a carved idol after it's cracked and carved it?

It is only a cast image a teacher of lies that's what an idol is for the one who cracks its shape trusts in it and makes worthless idols that cannot speak woe to him who says to a piece of wood wake up or to mute stone come alive can it teach Apocot says look it may be even plated with gold and silver yet there is no breath in it at all that's what an idol is it's futile and in our world we don't really have most of the idolatry of the modern ages not idols of wood and silver and gold but the idols of our ages just as futile as those as those that are described in

Abacock 2 and Paul affirms that knowledge Paul tells them that we know that there is but one God hear who Israel the Lord is our God the Lord is one this creedal statement affirming the monotheistic faith in the triune God has been confessed by God's people since the Old Testament along with the knowledge that idols are worthless the so-called gods in heaven and on earth that

the pagan world worships they're nothing yet at the same time they are something as Paul will further explain when we get to chapter 10 they are demonic with powers to entice and to enslave people in darkness we'll get there when we get to chapter 10 but here

[18:33] Paul is trying to say on the principle yes God is one idols are worthless verse 6 and yet for us there is one God the father from whom are all things and for whom we exist look at that creedal statement about God one God in three persons 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 this is a cradle statement likely known to the Corinthian church because it probably is a cradle statement known to all the churches in the first century and if it is indeed a cradle statement like our Nicene Creed kind of the whole church in current will have known it so why then will the weak brothers those who are bothered by food sacrifice to idols why are they so bothered you might ask don't they have the knowledge why can't they then operate based on that knowledge the strong notice

I'm putting all these in the weak and the strong according to Paul it's all Paul doesn't think doesn't ascribe any value to either party here but those who are strong in the church in current who thinks we can eat any meat that's before us they want Paul to rebuke the weak among them and tell them to stop being so foolish but instead Paul in his pastoral way affirms the principle truth of the claims made without invalidating the concerns of the weaker brothers and sisters and you know it's easy at this one as we read this and oftentimes when we read this passage of 1 Corinthians it's easy to assign worth to the strong as being more mature and more important but I want you to know that Paul does not do that in referring to the weak person in verse 11 he's not saying they're inferior in fact later in 1st

Corinthians he will speak of the weaker members of the body as being more indispensable as being recipients of greater honor in the body of Christ also remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when he speaks of his little ones when he says to his disciples that you must be like little children weak dependent trusting in order to enter his kingdom!

So Paul now makes his judgment on the matter in verse 7 to 13 so although we all confess the truth about the in existence of idols he says he writes to them not all possess this knowledge not all possess this knowledge while the strong members of the church cannot look beyond themselves Paul recognizes that not all in the church share in this knowledge it's not that they don't know the weak ones they don't know that idols are not nothing and weak idols and that there's only one God it's not that they don't know that they know that but knowledge is not just what you know here is it often knowledge is what you know here and sometimes here in your gut don't know what I'm referring to there and so

Paul is saying that he says we all know this but yet there are some among you don't know because there are some in the church who were still gripped by idols by the worship of idols through force of abbot even now as Christians they'd been idol worshippers they'd be so gripped by that time when they were worshipping idols and although they know that the idols are indeed nothing but before they were saved they'd been devoted to these idols they'd been heavily under their sway their life had been lived in bondage enslaved to these idols so much so that even now they cannot make the separation in their mind to eat this food in pagan temples is for them to betray their new identity as those in

[23:38] Christ Jesus their conscience could not allow them to do so this is what Paul refers to when he says the weak brothers their conscience is so stricken by idol worship and anything that pertains to idols that they cannot be as indifferent to it as others in the church were and so to eat such food for them is to defile themselves and the word implies there is to stain to pollute to make their conscience unclean so notice here that it is a matter of their own self awareness about themselves that's what conscience is so Paul in verse 8 is repeating or anticipating the counter argument that the strong party will make because they might probably say to

Paul food will not commend us to God we are no worse off if we do not eat and we're no better off if we do eat and they're right Paul will agree with them the food we eat does not improve our standing before God eating or abstaining from the food is neither here nor there in justifying us before God and Paul might agree with them and Paul in fact does agree with them if you read his letter to the Galatians that is his argument Paul advocated that this same point vehemently against those who will say otherwise your salvation is not dependent on observing Jewish dietary rules or ritual traditions food does not commend you to

God that's right but that's not Paul's concern here in first Corinthians in this context look there in verse 9 11 Paul invites them to take care verse 9 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 an idol's 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 this weak brother and sister is destroyed the brother for whom Christ died and so Paul is saying to them would you insist on your freedom and your right to eat even if it will mean scandalizing your brother in Christ who has a weaker conscience about this matter or will you forgo your right to eat out of love for him or her and you might say well why can't this brother just get his act together and just know that this is nothing and he just eat but Paul's answer there is in verse 11

Paul says he is your brother brother he is your brother for whom Christ died that's why you must value and tend to his conscience and his well-being he is dear and precious to the Lord just as much as you are so if you insist on standing on your right and you go eat in an idol's temple you wound the conscience of your sibling in Christ and if you do so you've actually sinned against him and by doing so you've also sinned against Christ so while it is true that food is neither here nor there your brother or sister in Christ is of great importance to Jesus so your consideration for them matters deeply to God and Paul concludes in verse 13 he says therefore based on this if food makes my brother to stumble

I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble now the word stumble in the Greek is skandalizo it's the same words that we get scandal from or to scandalize and it's the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew 18 verse 6 when he says whoever causes one of these little ones will believe in me to stumble what would happen to them it will be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he would drown in the depths of the sea those are Jesus words and Paul recognizing the full weight of it says to the Corinthian church I will rather forego my right to eat meat forever before I will ever make my brother to stumble that is knowledge working itself out in love and I hope it's clear to us that while food is the presenting issue upon which the [29 : 35] Corinthians were claiming their right here it is not just limited the matter is not just limited to food you can think what are the things in our world in our day on which we claim freedom or right to do I'm afraid we live in a culture that is perhaps even worse than the Corinthians our individualistic outlook never allows us to see beyond the claims for our own rights and our own freedom but we fail to see that the church of Christ is where such claims of personal rights and personal freedoms come to die a church that belongs to Jesus is a church where sacrificial love is lived out every day where empowered by the Holy Spirit we are enabled to live for

God and to love like God loved us remember brothers and sisters knowledge inflates puffs up it might seem at times that knowledge seem to be building up because it's it's look at the knowledge the imagery it inflates it puffs up you might think you're being built up by this knowledge but it's ultimately just empty hair that will pop at the slightest prick whereas love builds up love builds upon Jesus the chief cornerstone love raises living stones a spiritual building that is the church knowledge is deceptive when it's just knowledge for knowledge sake knowledge can give us a false sense of self but love is the real thing that matters to God a mature church is not necessarily a church full of accredited theologians that's not what makes that church mature rather a mature church is a church that puts the knowledge of God into action by loving one another so Holy Trinity if we want to continue to grow into the church Christ will have us to be it will mean we must be increasingly aware of one another's weaknesses one another's sensitivities and we are aware it's not so much so that we can lord it over one another but to lovingly care for one another we must be a church where we can freely confess our faults our weaknesses our fears our anxieties to one another in the lord and know that brothers and sisters will pray for you will love you will tend to you as Christ loves and tends to us it will mean we must not stand on our freedoms and our rights but we will be willing to relinquish them for the sake of our brothers and sisters for whom Christ died let us pray loving father help us not to let our knowledge about our rights and freedom in Christ pop us up let our love for you and for others inform and direct our knowledge making us mindful not to wound the conscience of others guiding our freedoms and building one another up we pray this in Christ's name amen