

Knowledge Puffs Up, Love Builds Up

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[0 : 00] The sermon text today is 1 Corinthians 8. At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare this is the word of the Lord, and the church in joyful response to his revelation given to us will together say thanks be to God.

Now concerning food offered to idols, we know 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 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 are all things and from whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are. And through whom we exist. However, not all possess his knowledge, but some, through former association with idols, eat food as rarely offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not condemn us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

But take care that right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who has knowledge, eating in idols' temple, will he not be encouraged?

[1 : 41] 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 brother, and wandering 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. Father, we come before you one more time, asking as we open this service that you would fill this place with your spirit.

Lord, flood our hearts, illuminate our minds. Lord, soften us to receive this word, and help us, God, to see Jesus in this text. In his name we pray. Amen.

Good morning, Shoreline. My name is Mike, one of the pastors here at this church. We're so glad that you're here worshiping with us this morning. Let's pretend for a second that we're going on a day trip to New York City.

[2 : 51] And we take the train in to Grand Central. Hopefully, maybe you've been there before. Can you picture yourself standing in the middle of the big terminal at Grand Central? In the middle there is this beautiful Steinway, a grand piano.

Let's say that I tell you, did you know that I'm an expert pianist? You might laugh a little bit. But then you, of course, ask me, well, okay, then sit down and play me something, you know?

But what if I object and say, no, no, no, no, no, no. I don't actually play the piano. But then I begin regurgitating to you all of my vast music theory knowledge, you know, about time and meter and scales and chords.

And you exclaim, well, what good is all that knowledge if you can't even play any music, right? You know, one of the themes that we keep coming back to this year is that gospel doctrine, what we believe and profess with our lips is intended to produce gospel culture.

That's what we practice with our lives. Knowledge of and belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ, it ought to lead to the beautiful music of displaying Christ in our lives together.

[4 : 02] But as Ray Ortlund pointed out, and I've quoted this before, Ray Ortlund says, it is possible for us to unsay by our practical church culture what we say in our official church doctrine.

It is possible to hold the gospel as a theory even as we lose it as a reality. You know, here in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul is exposing an area in which the Corinthians were losing the gospel as a reality

within their church culture, even as they upheld it in doctrine.

So if you haven't turned there already, please turn to 1 Corinthians 8. If you don't have a Bible, we have Bibles on the back table already bookmarked to today's passage. There's even some large print Bibles back there.

You're welcome to keep one of those as a gift to you. This year, we are walking through the book of 1 Corinthians. And I just realized, I actually said, I told you all a few months ago that we're going to be covering the whole book in the first half of the year, but we're actually not going to anymore. We're going to be going through chapter 14, and then in the summer, July and August, spending time in the Psalms. And then we're going to come back to chapter 15 and do a deep dive on the resurrection, which is going to be awesome.

[5 : 17] But we're walking through the book of 1 Corinthians as we consider the church's call to display Christ in all things. If you go back one, the church's call to display Christ in all things.

And as we're entering today into a new section of the letter, it's helpful to locate ourselves on the map. So big picture, chapters 1 through 6, Paul has been addressing issues within the Corinthian church that were reported to him.

That was from Chloe's delegation. And they had to do with unity. That was chapters 1 through 4.

And then holiness. And that was chapters 5 through 6. And then in chapter 7, Paul began to address issues the Corinthians had specifically written him about, seeking his counsel.

And chapter 7 was the topic of marriage and singleness. And now Paul is turning to address a new issue, that of food offered to idols.

Now this section, it runs from chapter 8, verse 1, all the way to 11, verse 1. And more generally, this section has to do with Christian liberty or freedom.

[6 : 23] And we'll unpack that as we move forward here. And as we cover these chapters, it's going to be over the course of four sermons. We're going to pause next week for Easter to focus explicitly on the resurrection.

But we're going to be spending four sermons covering these chapters. And we encourage you, read through the whole section, 8.1 to 11.1. Even do so multiple times as we walk through this together. Because it helps us to see the overall arc to Paul's argument in these chapters. The title of today's sermon, which comes straight out of verse 1, is Knowledge Puffs Up, Love Builds Up.

That is essentially the main point of Paul's argument in this chapter. And just to put a little more meat on the bones, Paul is arguing that knowledge alone, as a guide for Christian living, is insufficient.

But must be accompanied by Christ-like love for others. Paul puts this main point in view from the very beginning.

[7 : 22] And then he works through the chapter to show how this plays out in the Corinthian-specific situation. So point one, the main point. Knowledge puffs up. Love builds up.

We see this in verses 1 through 3. So look in your Bibles at verse 1. Now concerning food offered to idols. So Paul, he uses his customary formula, now concerning, to introduce the next topic the Corinthians have written him about.

Food offered to idols. Now it's helpful. We need to understand some of the cultural context as we seek to interpret what Paul is saying. Now I don't know about you, but I don't personally know anyone that performs animal sacrifices to idols.

Though to be sure, this is a reality in other parts of the world. But in the city of Corinth, there were numerous temples or sanctuaries devoted to an abundance of gods.

Ruins of the Temple of Apollo still stand today if you were to go to Corinth. And at these temples, animals would be regularly offered up in sacrifice to the gods. And then leftover meat was consumed by the priests, or it was served at meals that were hosted within the temples.

[8 : 32] This was actually a social space as well. Funerals, birthday parties, dinner parties would be hosted in the temple grounds. And so the meat would be served there, or the meat would be sold in the marketplace.

Now the question that Paul is seeking to address in these chapters is how Christians ought to regard the eating of this food. Now some in Corinth, as we'll see here, some in Corinth maintained with a tight theological argument that it was perfectly acceptable.

In other words, they had the freedom, the right in Christ to eat such meat. But others in Corinth, especially Gentiles who had fled from a life of paganism and idol worship, they maintained that to

eat such meat would be returning to their former sin.

It would be incompatible with their new faith in Jesus. Okay, so while the specific topic of food offered to idols may not be relevant for us today, the question of how we interact, how we engage with our secular culture, how we engage with its habits and its customs, and how we regard fellow believers as we do, that is a timeless question.

That's as relevant today as it was in the first century. So as we move through this text, I want you to consider, be thinking about, be writing down even, what are modern day examples of food offered to idols?

[10:01] Okay, so how does Paul address this sensitive and emotionally charged issue? Here's how he begins. We know, look at verse 1, we know that all of us possess knowledge.

This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Now, most of your Bible translations helpfully add quotes around, all of us possess knowledge.

Because as we've seen throughout the letter, Paul seems to be quoting the Corinthians here. And he seems to be affirming their statement. We know, as in, yes, indeed, we certainly all possess knowledge.

But even in his affirmation, I think we can read a little bit of sarcasm and irony because of what he says next. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

So once again, we see the Corinthian pride. Okay, they have a problem with being puffed up in supposed wisdom and knowledge, in supposed spiritual maturity and superiority.

[11:07] We've seen this word before. The word translated puffs up, which means to inflate. It's happened four times already. It was translated as puffed up back in chapter 4, verse 6.

And then it was translated as arrogant in 4, verse 18 and 19. And then in chapter 5, verse 2. Okay, so this keeps coming up. You may have knowledge, Paul is saying, but this is merely inflating your ego.

Right? Your heads are swelling while your Grinch-like hearts are two sizes too small. It's love. Love that builds up. And that's what you need.

Okay, so right here at the start of this three-chapter argument, Paul underscores the primacy, the priority of Christ-like love over against mere knowledge.

And going hand-in-hand with Christian love is Christian humility. Look at verse 2. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

[12:10] Now, as someone in my community group pointed out, what Paul is talking about here is a reality that we so readily see in the home and the school and the workplace when someone gains just a little bit of knowledge, you know, enough to be dangerous.

They've learned 10%, and they go flaunting their vast knowledge to the world, right? I was that kid as a junior higher. You can ask my mom about it, though it was mostly directed at my dad, constantly correcting him as if I knew so much.

This is being sophomoric. Okay? Literally a wise fool. That's what the word sophomore means if you didn't know. And if you think about the high school dynamics, or less so in college, but high school, it makes sense, right?

The sophomores, they're like, oh yeah, we're not freshmen anymore. And everyone's like, you're still at the bottom of the school, right? If you think you know something, realize this, Paul is saying, you don't yet know as you ought to know.

Like, you have a long way to go. Saints, we need to have the humility to acknowledge that on this side of heaven, whether we've been a Christian for 50 days or 50 years, we all still have a long way to go.

[13:25] We all remain apprentices, lifelong learners. Like, none of us has achieved a level of mastery of spiritual knowledge. But perhaps even more to the point of this chapter, Tom Schreiner writes this, true knowledge is adorned with humility and accompanied by love.

And if these qualities are lacking, one's knowledge has not been applied correctly. That's the kind of knowledge that God wants us to have, a knowledge that's accompanied by, that leads to love and humility.

And where is such love for others to be found? Look at verse three. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

The only way to manifest genuine, Christ-like love for others is first to love God and be known by God. Our love for God, our love for Christ is primary, and that then spills over into a life of love for

others.

But why does Paul say, if anyone loves God, he is known by God? And not, if anyone loves God, he knows God? Because that's what I would have expected Paul to say.

[14:46] And certainly both are true. Listen to Paul's words in Galatians 4.9. Similar idea here. Paul says in Galatians 4.9, but now that you have come to know God, or rather, to be known by God.

In 1 Corinthians, in Galatians 4, Paul is asserting the priority here. There's a primacy of God's knowing of us rather than our knowing of him. And this gets right at the heart of the gospel. We were singing about this before. I was dead in my sin. I was blind to spiritual things. I could never know God on my own. But I was made to know him, but could not do so in my sin.

But in redemptive love, God initiated. God took the first step. He moved towards me. He moved towards us. Fully knowing us in our sin, in our guilt, in our ugliness, and yet fully loving us to the point of sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins.

And to make us children of God. In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

[16:03] We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4, 10 and 19. Brothers and sisters, we are fully known and fully loved by God.

This is the heart of the gospel. And our being known and being loved by God, it leads to our knowing and loving God, which then overflows and manifests itself in love for others.

And this is true spiritual knowledge. So each of us ought to prayerfully consider. This is your homework. Prayerfully consider.

Is my knowledge of God and the gospel leading me to build up others, to love others? And as we reflect, we ought to think about the real interactions of our real relationships.

As 1 John 3, 18 reminds us, Christ-like love is not merely words, but actions. Second, each of us ought to prayerfully consider, am I humbly teachable?

[17:09] Am I aware of my lifelong apprentice and learner status? Do I demonstrate both before the Lord and before others a humble receptivity to correction in my thinking rather than always asserting that I'm right?

This is your homework for the week. Having laid down the main principle of Paul's argument, he moves from there to then affirm the knowledge of the Corinthians. So this is point number two.

Knowledge affirmed as good. There is one God and Lord. Look in your Bibles at verse four.

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.

Now again, the use of quotes in most translations reflects that Paul is probably again quoting the Corinthians. Now these truths are a part of their theological argument for why some viewed it as perfectly acceptable to eat food offered to idols.

and Paul affirms their theology as good and right. Yes, we know and affirm that an idol has no real existence. Right? Yes, we know and affirm that there is only one God.

[18:25] Do you remember all those courtroom scenes for those that were here in the fall in Isaiah we looked at over and over again? God proved time and again the worthlessness of false gods and idols and declared himself to be the only true God.

Here's one example from Isaiah 45. They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols and keep on praying to a God that cannot save. And there is no other God besides me a righteous God and a Savior there is none besides me declares the Lord.

Now Paul is reaching further back than Isaiah of course here because from the beginning God revealed himself as the only the one and only true God. this monotheism set Israel apart as distinct from their pagan polytheistic neighbors.

Deuteronomy 6 verse 4 Moses declared Hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one. This is probably what Paul is directly alluding to.

That was referred to as the Jewish Shema. It was spoken all the time in the temple and in homes. But then Paul goes on to reframe the Jewish Shema in Christological terms.

[19:40] Verse 5 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 are all things and for whom we exist and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Sure the surrounding pagan culture worships many gods and lords but these are merely so-called gods. They're counterfeits.

Right? They're ineffective. They're powerless. The true reality is that in contrast to the supposed many gods and many lords there is one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ.

God the Father Paul is confessing is the great source of all things. Right? Not the plurality of Roman and Greek gods. He alone the great source of all things and God the Father is not only the source but the end the goal of our existence.

It's for the praise and honor and glory of him alone that we were made. Moreover Paul declares Jesus Christ is Lord.

[20 : 53] You know when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday he fulfilled that prophetic word that we read earlier foretelling of the coming king who would save and this king would not only be the king of Israel but the king of glory the Lord strong and mighty the Lord of hosts Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen? And the Lord Jesus Christ Paul confesses here is the great means the great mediator all things being made through him in our existence both physically and spiritually coming through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul affirms he affirms the Corinthians theology and yet expounds on it with this beautiful declaration of Trinitarian theology. He's professing at the same time the oneness of God yet the distinct persons of father and son and I say Trinitarian because Paul has already affirmed the Holy Spirit as well as one with God and yet himself a distinct person you can go back to chapter 2 but he talks all over about the Holy Spirit.

You know I love the simple beauty of the New City Catechism how they answer question 3. How many persons are there in God? There are three persons and the one true and living God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit they are the same in substance equal in power and glory and then question 4 says how and why did God create us?

God created us male and female in his own image to know him love him live with him and glorify him and it is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory.

[22 : 41] Before we move on in Paul's argument I just want to ask do you believe that there was one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe that this morning?

Do you believe that God is the source of your existence and the end of your existence? Do you believe that Jesus is the means through which you were given physical and spiritual life?

I hope that you do and if you have questions about any of that because we are plowing through some really complex theology here if you have questions I would love to talk to you about any of that.

Those that know and believe these things in our hearts we need to pause here and consider whether there is a gap between our knowing and our living out in practice.

Do we live with the humble awareness that God is the source of all things even our very lives? A mentor of mine once prayed for me that each day I would wake up in humble dependence on the Lord and each night that I would go to sleep in humble gratitude for the mercy that he had shown me that day.

[23 : 52] The beautiful arc to our day every day waking up independence going to sleep in gratitude. Do we live with awe and gratitude that Christ is the means and the mediator through which we have life?

Do we think desire feel speak act with the conscious awareness that our lives were created for God's glory alone? Now maybe this is actually what Paul is doing here.

Maybe Paul is subtly suggesting to these knowers or know-it-alls of Corinth that there is a gap between their sound theology and the application of that theology in real life.

And either way whether he's doing that in these verses he's going to go on to do that in the last part of our text for today. Knowledge exposed as insufficient. It must be accompanied by love.

So look back in your Bibles verse 7. Paul says, however, not all possess this knowledge. I think Paul is referring to the knowledge of verses 4 through 6.

[25 : 02] But not so much the knowledge itself as the conclusion that these knowers of Corinth are drawing from that knowledge. This is what I mean. Paul is saying, yes, we all affirm that there's only one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ.

We all affirm that idols are not really anything at all, but not everyone takes the next step. Okay? Not everyone goes where the knowers of Corinth are going that therefore one should not eat food offered to idols.

Now why is that? Why do some not take that next step? Because, look at your Bibles, some through former association with idols eat food as really offered to an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled.

Look, some of the believers in Corinth used to worship these so-called gods and lords as really being gods and lords. Now they have since forsaken that life.

They've come to believe in Jesus Christ as the one Lord and Savior. They know that there is only one God and Lord. But, because of their past idolatry, they cannot shake the feeling, the conviction that to eat food offered to an idol is to participate with the pagans in their idol worship.

[26 : 16] So for them to do this, it's to go against, to defile or violate conscience and so bring guilt upon themselves. But, Paul says, verse 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. Some see this verse as Paul quoting the Corinthians again. That this was actually part of their theological argument for why they could eat food offered to idols.

And it very well may be, but it's still consistent. Whether it's the Corinthians slogan or not, it's still consistent with biblical truth. It's very similar to what Paul said throughout chapter 7, that God's not so concerned with one's marital or social or religious status as with one's love and devotion to Him. It's also consistent with what Paul says in Romans 14, verse 17, that the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but what? Of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

That's what the kingdom of God is about. And third, it actually follows from Jesus' own teaching. Jesus said in Matthew 15, verse 11, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth, because what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart.

[27 : 40] Okay, so in light of that, therefore, Paul declares, those with a weak conscience need to hit the gym and bulk up and just stop being so weak. Is that what Paul says?

No, no, no. Paul, he doesn't address them, the weak. Paul says, but take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

Listen, this is the one imperative in this whole text. And who is it directed at? The knowers of Corinth. I heard the word strong. Totally understand why you said that.

There's a really interesting distinction here we're going to get to a little bit later. Paul never uses the word strong. They're the knowers of Corinth. Paul gives no imperative to the weak only to the knowers, the ones who see no problem with eating the meat offered to an idol.

Their command is take care, watch out, that the exercise of their freedom or right does not become a stumbling block to the weak. And at this point, so this is where I'm going.

[28 : 44] I want to make us aware of something that's really important here. Paul conceals something in his argument until chapter 10, but I think it's really important that we see what he says. Go to chapter 10 in your Bibles.

Look at verses 19 through 21. 19 through 21 of chapter 10. Paul says, What do I imply then?

That food offered to idols is anything? Or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord that's in the Lord's Supper and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Now, why did we just read that? Because Paul in chapter 10 actually condemns eating in temples as straight-up sin. He addresses the topic of food offered to idols for three chapters, and yet he waits until the end of his argument to expressly condemn eating in temples as sin.

[29 : 59] Now, if you're familiar with Romans 14, you will see clear parallels between 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 and you're correct in drawing parallels.

But it's also important to make a distinction between these two passages. In Romans 14, Paul is addressing the eating of food that was considered unclean according to Jewish ceremonial law. And he's saying, we have freedom in Christ from that law. The gospel has set us free. Here in 1 Corinthians, Paul is addressing the eating of food sacrificed to pagan idols.

These are two different contexts, yes, with similarities, but also important distinctions. In this present matter, Paul, in the end, condemns eating in idol temples as sin.

And there's a good chance that the knowers of Corinth, see, they're not the strong, the knowers of Corinth already knew Paul's stance on the matter. Because it wasn't only Paul's stance.

[30 : 57] This is actually clear from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. All of the apostles instructed believers not to eat food offered to idols. This is also seen in Revelation chapter 2 when Jesus addresses the church in Pergamum.

But the Corinthian knowers, they had constructed a fine-sounding theological argument to ignore Paul's instructions and it was probably motivated by a desire to maintain social status in the community.

We've seen this desire in the first few chapters of the letter. Now we're going to draw out some of the implications of this in chapter 10 when we get there, but I wanted you to see it right now.

The reason I bring all this up now in chapter 8 is that Paul, you know, he's concealing this part of his argument because he's underscoring all the more the primary message of this chapter, chapter 8. And then he's going to go on to show this message in his own example in chapter 9. What's the message? His primary concern is their lack of love for fellow believers, right?

[32 : 02] Paul knows that what they're doing is sin in and of itself, but his primary concern before he gets there is their lack of love for fellow believers. And this is what he's driving home.

Knowledge alone is insufficient, but it must be accompanied by love and he's not going to move past that message. Knowledge puffs up the pride, but love builds up.

Love is willing to lay down one's rights for the sake of the other. And he's saying here, love would never cling so tightly to a right as to become a stumbling block to another believer.

And that's what these knowers of Corinth are doing. They're being stumbling blocks to the weaker brothers and sisters. Verse 10, 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?

The word translated here as encouraged, it's actually the same word in verse 1 where Paul said that love builds up. Some building up, right?

[33 : 09] Paul's sarcasm here I think is intentional. He's saying you ought to be building up your brother in love, but instead your knowledge is building them up to go and defile their conscience.

And so by your knowledge, verse 11, this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Paul's using really strong language here.

This weak person is destroyed. They're being led down a path to destruction. So you knowers, so secure in your theological knowledge, are unwilling to give up meat for the sake of your brother, yet the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, by the way, was willing to lay down his very life upon the cross for that same brother.

And we're reminded here of the scandal of Palm Sunday and Good Friday. How Jesus, the conquering king, rode into Jerusalem amid shouts of praise, yet only five days later would become the suffering servant, yielding his life in injustice for the redemption of sinful mankind.

Jesus is the ultimate example of forsaking rights for the sake of his beloved. For Jesus did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but did what?

[34 : 32] Emptied himself. Taking on human flesh, taking on the form of a servant, going to the cross like a condemned criminal where he, the king of kings, laid down every right, for the sake of us weak sinners.

Saints, when we grasp but a measure of how infinitely Christ has condescended for our good, we are motivated and empowered in the spirit to do similarly for others.

Though to be sure, giving up meat is trivial compared to laying down the life of the Son of God. And yet it's a sacrifice indeed. It is a sacrifice and it's one that we're called to make following his example.

Paul's line of reasoning is not quite done. After showing these knowers of Corinth the dichotomy between themselves and their Savior, Paul says, verse 12, thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Yes, Paul goes so far as to call this lack of concern for brother sin. Sin not only against that brother but sin against Jesus Christ himself.

[35 : 58] Now, Paul's probably pulling from two biblical truths. First, that all sin is ultimately against God. That's what King David confesses in Psalm 51. But perhaps more in view here is that Jesus, he so closely identifies himself with his followers that to sin against them is to sin against him.

Now, surely this lesson was forever etched on Paul's heart. Because you remember on the road to Damascus when the blinding light shone and the voice of Jesus came from heaven, what did Jesus say to him?

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Yes, Jesus identifies himself so closely with those who are his.

Now, this is a great comfort to the saints. Jesus aligns himself with us and yet, it's also a warning to us as well, right? In our pride and lack of regard for others that our sin against a sister is a sin against the Savior.

And therefore, Paul concludes, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat lest I make my brother stumble.

[37 : 13] So here's the conclusion of the matter, which Paul applies to himself first, right? Now, he's going to transition in chapter 9 to talk about his own example, so this is sort of a transition verse, but I think, too, the use of first person here, it just makes this message land with force and impact.

Paul has concluded that he will certainly never ever, very strong language, eat meat if there is a chance that it could lead a brother or sister into sin.

See, for Paul, it's vastly more important that he love his brother than cling to a right. so have you thought of any modern day food offered to idle situations yet?

You know, perhaps someone was saved out of a life of alcohol addiction and now they want nothing whatsoever to do with alcohol. For them to partake now is to rehearse and re-enter that former life of sin.

The call here is for those who have no struggle with alcohol, who see it as perfectly acceptable to have a drink here or there to be willing to lay that right down if it were to lead to the stumbling of their brother in Christ.

[38 : 27] And you know, this principle of laying down rights so as not to lead someone astray, that can be extended into all kinds of other areas like choices of entertainment or choices of music.

Now I hesitate to give more specific examples because it's so vast and it could take the form of anything on any given day. I want us to think, to reflect, to pray on our own about what it is for us, what rights do we cling to, and perhaps lead others astray and into sin.

But if we pan one level out further, what we see in this text is the principle of being willing, like Christ, to lay down our rights for the sake of love and unity.

As one pastor said, unity lives where self-regard dies, and self-regard dies at the foot of the cross. Unity lives where self-regard dies, and self-regard dies at the foot of the cross. Can you envision for a moment, saints, can you envision a church filled with believers who, with eyes fixed on Christ and the cross, daily crucify their own desires, their own flesh, and move towards others constantly in self-giving, self-denying love?

[39 : 52] Can you imagine a whole church body that did that? Can you envision a home, your own home, where spouses and parents continually surrender their own rights, looking not to their own interests, but the interests of the others, for the sake of love, for the sake of unity?

In all of our relationships, what must ultimately govern is Christ-like sacrificial love. You know, if our mode of operation is acting purely based on an analytical calculation that says, I'm right, you're wrong, therefore I'm free to act in this way, then we are seriously missing the mark.

Our knowledge, in that case, it's led us to an inflated ego that left love out of the equation. But when we operate instead from a heart that's informed with right knowledge, yes, but also filled with Christ-like love, then we have something melodic and beautiful.

Then we have something divine. Then we have something of heaven touching earth in our very midst. then we have gospel culture. Gospel culture that validates, that adorns our doctrine.

And that is a powerful testimony to the watching world. And as Paul says in Ephesians 3.10, not only the watching world, but to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

[41 : 26] That is putting Christ on glorious display, instructing the heavenly beings, beckoning the lost to salvation in Christ, and it's glorifying the God and Father for whom we exist.

Please go with me in prayer. Lord, we are amazed that Christ, the King of Kings, the one who dwelt with the Father from eternity past in glory, glory, took on the form of man, bore with us on this earth, endured all the temptations and the trials that is common to men, and he went to the cross as a condemned criminal, the King of Kings, the creator of the universe, laying down every right because

he loved us.

Lord, we love because you first loved us. We know you because you knew us. And Lord, we desire to manifest that love in all of our relationships.

We desire to show that self-denying love that lays down rights in the church and in the home and in the workplace.

Lord, we want to put you on display. God, we need your help to do this because our pride is so strong. Our flesh is so strong. We need your help every single day to do this.

[43 : 11] So Lord, I pray that we would be a church that is so centered on Christ and the gospel, and there at the foot of the cross, our self-regard would die every day, every hour, however often we need to do it, Lord, so that your love would be what's on display through us.

For the glory of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. Would you stand and reply?