

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 PM

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[0 : 0 0] Folks, it's lovely, so lovely to see you all. If you're brand new, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm one of the ministers on staff here. I officiated a wedding, I don't know, about four, five years ago.

Folks from this service, sort of 40-somethings. And before they started dating, or before they knew each other, he sort of sat, he used to, you know people like to sit in the same place, right?

He used to sit right at the back of the church. And she would sit sort of nearer the front on this side over here. And he liked the look of her, but they never met.

He was really shy. And he didn't, you know, he didn't want to come across too forthright and just bowl on up to her. So what he did was each week at church when he arrived, he just sat one pew closer to her.

This is a true story. He told me when they're engaged, every week, just sat one pew closer, one pew, you know, switched across the aisle, one pew closer.

[1 : 1 0] And it took like a couple of months. And it took a couple of months. And eventually on some certain day, he was literally sitting behind her so that at greeting time, he had an excuse to say hi.

And the very first date that they went on was to a Journey concert. You know a Journey? Don't Stop Believing? That's a killer, that's a killer first date.

Obviously, they fell in love and they got married. Now, I remembered them when I was thinking about Paul's strategy in 1 Corinthians. Let me tell you why.

See, Paul in our letter here, he is slowly, step by step, step by step, walking us towards a really big idea that's not immediately obvious what's happening.

And so what he does is, rather than bringing the hammer down on some folks who are doing stupid things, he just gently, slowly, pastorally, patiently takes us through his thinking, step by step, step by step, we get closer to it.

[2 : 2 3] In chapter 10, because we're talking about something pretty specific here, in chapter 10, Paul says, if you go to these pagan festivals and you participate in them, you're basically, he said, you're just having communion with demons.

So that's him bringing the hammer down. But we're at the beginning of chapter 8. And right now, he's just gently, step by step, step by step, getting us there, walking us there.

And there's a lot to talk about between now and then. So let's kind of dive into the passage. And just a heads up, this is not a three-point sermon. I'm just kind of going to stay at about 40,000 feet and talk you through sort of the story of what's going on.

But first, just a reminder. So Corinthians is a book, let's say it's this big. It's broken up into kind of five major sort of sections. And in each section, Paul deals with a sort of a specific thing that he sticks with for a few chapters.

So the first one, if you may remember, it was on divisions in the church. People were like knocking heads, right? The next section, which was a few chapters, was about sex and relationships. We've just started, we're just starting the third section of the book.

[3 : 39] So we're right about here, the third section of the book, which is, begins in chapter eight, finishes at the end of chapter 10. It's about food sacrificed to idols. And I know that this morning you woke up thinking to yourself, I just don't know how I'm going to navigate all the food sacrificed to idols and I know I know I know I know it's not it does not seem relevant, does it?

It's not front of mind for us. But it is. It is. We just have to do a little bit of work. Trust me. Okay, so let me tell you what I think is, what's the likely story behind Paul's words here.

And then we'll see that there's this presenting issue, fair sacrifice to idols, and then we'll see there's this thing behind it, which is all the stuff for us. Okay, so there's this church in Corinth.

Paul started this church and then he took off and he started churches in other places. Now, Corinth was a very polytheistic city, so lots of temples, lots of gods to worship.

And unlike kind of like these sort of Western society, there wasn't a state sort of church split. So religion and politics and social activities were all kind of mushed together. And so these temples would have their religious services, but they'd also have in the temples these big like dining halls.

[5 : 01] So like trade guilds would meet there for like whatever their monthly meeting. People would have birthday parties there as well. And they'd have a little bit of a kind of like a liturgy thing.

That kind of stuff was going on. It was a real sort of hub of the community. At these temple services, they would sacrifice an animal, goat or something like that. And a third of it was a orpasha.

Part of it was just burnt up as a sacrifice. Part of it, the priests could eat. That was part of the kind of the package. And some of it was sold to butchers, to on sale.

Some of it was eaten by the people who had come to these big sort of parties or feasts. And meat was expensive. So it was rare to eat meat back in the day. So this was a bit of a treat for the people that came along.

And as well as eating the meat like at a birthday party, there would also be like a little bit of a religious-y kind of aspect to that as well. As well as the big kind of like Sunday services.

[5 : 58] I don't know if it was on Sunday, but big sort of Sunday pagan-y service things they had. So it was, for the average person, it was a smart move to go to these things. You'd make connections, it's good for business relationships, celebrate with family, see relatives, right around.

Okay. Now, so there's this church that Paul started. The Christians at this church, can they go to these functions? Can they go to these things? You know, you're probably thinking, well, you probably shouldn't go to the Sunday service thing, but could you go to like, you know, could you go to the birthday party where they do a little bit of liturgy, kill an animal, you know, dedicate it to Apollos or Hermes or something?

Could you go to those things? Seems like there was a big, powerful group in the church that Paul started that said, yes, totally go to these things.

And their reasoning is in verse one. Paul quotes them. In verse one, it says, all of us possess knowledge. That's a quote.

So somebody probably wrote to Paul and said, you know, these guys are saying all of us possess knowledge. That's a quote from this group. And what's the knowledge he's talking about? Well, that's what they know about Jesus.

[7 : 21] That's what they know about the idols. And there's a great summary of this in verse six. 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.

Now, if you look at verse four there, based on this shared knowledge, here is what, the folks who said, you should go to these things, you're allowed to go to these things, here's what they say. Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that an idol has no real existence and there's only one God anyway.

So they're like, idol, idol, shmairo, doesn't matter. It's just a piece of stone. It's got no real power. There's nothing to these things. So based on that, there was a group in the church who said, we can totally go to, we can totally go to these things and eat the meat that's been offered to idols.

Based on their knowledge of the situation, they're saying, we have the right to do this and that's their position. So how does Paul respond to this?

Because obviously, there's a bit of drama in the church. What's he say to them? Well, first he addresses the knowledge bit. Back to verse one.

[8 : 41] Let me read it again. Now concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge. That's quoting them, this powerful group. Paul adds this. He says, this knowledge, though, that you guys love, it puffs up.

But love builds up. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. So being puffed up was the problem with this powerful group in the church who said, you can just go to all of these things, it doesn't really matter, right?

This was a proud church, they thought they were the smartest church in the world. This puffed up phrase, it means like you blowing up a balloon or a paper bag or something like that. And Paul's saying, this is what this knowledge has done for you guys, it's given you a big head.

Now if you look at verse two, verse two says, if anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. This is the other thing he says to these guys who are puffed up.

He reminds them that their knowledge is lacking something. He says, there's something about your knowledge that's missing and you don't realize it.

[9 : 46] He comes back to that later on. So we'll come back to it later on. So in response to the, we can eat the idle meat if we want stance, Paul says, your knowledge around this thing, it's made you arrogant and you're kind of missing a really big idea here, which we'll come back to.

Okay. Then Paul says, what about, what about the kind of the newer Christians in your congregation? What about them? Shouldn't that figure into the equation as well?

That's verses sort of seven to 13, but let me remind you just of verse seven here. It says, however, not all possess this knowledge, but some, through former association with idols, eat food as rarely offered to an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled.

So these are folks who used to be hardcore into the pagan temple thing. They've become Christians and what it seems was happening is these newer Christians still roar in their faith with the memory of knowing what exactly this whole temple thing's about are watching these, this powerful group of Christians, these older Christians go to these events where some goats being sacrificed to a polis being eaten and it's really disturbing for them because in their minds just by eating it they're actually participating in idol worship.

However, not all possess this knowledge but some through former association. So this is just like in their minds it's just like sparking a whole lot of stuff. They're going, oh my goodness, you guys are worshipping, you're worshipping idols now by doing that.

[11 : 27] Now presumably we're kind of talking about the events held at the temple like the birthdays and the business lunches and not maybe the full on full on pagan worship services. Or maybe just eating the meat from the butcher that might have been sacrificed to a polis but they just sort of don't know.

But still for these newer Christians for them even though there's only one God and this idol is just stone for them it's like these folks they're watching people who are supposed to be Christians worshipping some Greek God.

Here's what Paul says to these puffed up Christians and he lays it up pretty clearly in verses 9 to 11. He says, 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 an idol's temple they'll 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.

He's saying to this powerful group you're harming the faith of others by doing this. You're hurting the faith of people a fellow Christian you're hurting the faith of somebody that Christ really loves. Christ loved them so much that he died for them it says.

[12 : 46] In fact you could actually destroy the faith of some of these people by doing what you're doing. So why are they doing it? Why is this powerful group doing it? Verse 9 Take care that this right of yours See Paul goes on to say you guys are just standing on what you see as your rights in a situation and when you stand on your rights it can actually be a sin you can actually be sinning you can be sinning against Christ verse 12 tells us Paul finishes here by saying this look my attitude is this if there's a chance that eating this meat in this temple scenario birthday party business lunch whatever it is if there's a chance this will cause somebody to stumble which will hurt it will hurt their faith if there's a chance that's going to happen I'm a vegetarian that's what he says verse 13 therefore if food makes my brother or sister stumble I will never eat meat lest I make my brother or sister stumble it's a wonderful attitude the arrogant attitude is this I know better I am more spiritual

I have rights and that leads me to act in a certain way and that's that rights we're big on rights in the west Paul says I know things I know some stuff but love is going to determine the way I act the puffed up folks in Corinth based on their knowledge technically yes they could eat the meat the temple meat you know they could theologise it in their head but their hearts were just wrong now I'm not down on knowledge and theology you know I've spent a lot of money on a theological education you know in our faith knowledge thinking it's really important but knowledge being technically theologically accurate is not sufficient to live the Christian life well and Paul he keeps harping on about this he keeps coming back to this idea sort of towards the end of the book in 1 Corinthians 13 2 he says this if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love

I am nothing so in life think well read books do some courses listen to some podcasts but know you can be brilliant but useless one of my kids scored an own goal in soccer a month or so ago it was brutal technically he scored though right he technically scored you know but it wasn't helpful to the team imagine a basketball player great basketball player who never misses a shot but keeps shooting in the opposition's basket this person might say you know at half time man I'm killing it today like I'm you know I'm five from five from the three point line and his teammates are going to respond by saying but you're you're destroying our team like you're shooting at the wrong basket and he can say yes but I haven't missed though have I you know this is like the attitude of these this puffed up the arrogant crew at this church their theological accuracy was making them worthless to the community like useless like that even with they're actually harming the community by their lack of love remember verse 2 if anyone imagines that he or she knows something he does not yet know as he or she ought to know these Christians they knew stuff they were technically right about the meat the idols they're just stone there's nothing there's nothing there in their own eyes they were very clever but something was missing

Paul alludes to right at the start and here he tells us what it is and that's that the knowledge they possess should be used in the service of love in building others up that's true knowledge in God's eyes let me summarize this for us knowledge and pride which is what was going on for this group in the church is a terrible combination isn't it knowledge and pride because what it can do is it creates these kind of blind spots in our life when it comes to loving each other and I hate to be triggery but COVID was a great example of this became this very politicized thing so you had people on both sides of the equation and I don't know what you call them liberal conservative whatever you want to call them people on both sides of the aisle doing study doing reading thinking a lot about it reading blog posts and as a result of that knowledge acting in certain ways they felt like they had the right to act ways they felt perfectly entitled to act in but there were some folks on both sides who were sinning maybe they had all the right technical ideas in their brain but they weren't loving each other they weren't thinking about what do I do with this knowledge how do I love each other in this situation they were puffed up with their knowledge they failed to love

I'll give you a personal example not from COVID but when I was backpacking around Europe when I was a young man backpacking around Europe for three months it was brilliant and I staying at a hostel sitting around at this big table having dinner with some folks and I was having a discussion with an Australian woman sitting I can remember they're so vividly dark here short sitting right in front of me about 20 people around the table big table all backpackers talking about philosophy and I started talking about religion and faith and it was great we're having and the woman in front of me who was really lovely she said yes but there's no truth though is there you know I'm saying this stuff you know she goes but there is no truth there was there there's no truth there's no truth there is no ultimate right and wrong I said really you sure she goes yep she goes yep there are no absolutes in life there's no absolutes

[19:24] I said really no truth no there's no absolutes nope I said are you absolutely sure and by this point in the conversation everybody was listening I said are you absolutely sure and she said yes and in a moment I thought yes I've got you and two seconds after she said that she looked completely deflated looked down at the ground because everyone had started laughing at her you know because I'd trapped her theologically and philosophically and I knew at that moment that I would never get a chance to talk to her again because I'd humiliated her I had all and here's the thing intellectually I was in good shape intellectually her argument was pretty brittle I think philosophically but I just overpowered and I never got to talk to her again we are an intellectual church and you know thinking about rights and brands and all that stuff the danger for folks like us is that it can give us a false sense of we can act however we want act in a certain way because we're theologically accurate you know but God reminds us here we might be brilliant but we can actually harm the kingdom of

God if we don't love if love is not driving the decisions that we make so just two questions and I'll leave you with these is how can you love well in this community and the people in the community that you live in how can you love them well as opposed to just trying to be technically theologically right when you're around them the other question is how are you failing to love well in this community and the community you find yourself living in and I'll leave that with you and the Holy Spirit Amen