

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**Spirit filled living in a broken and fallen world**  
**1 Corinthians 8 – What’s up with the food!?!**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer - February 5, 2017**



**Temple (food offered to “idols”)**



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**Cruise ship seafood buffet**



**Las Vegas dessert buffet**

The Greek goddess Hedone and Dionysus (Chinese, Aztec, Hindu, Native American, Slavic, African – almost every culture has a god of licentious pleasure.

Let's go ahead and start right out in our passage . . .

### **1 Corinthians 8 (NIV)**

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. <sup>2</sup> Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But whoever loves God is known by God.

<sup>4</sup> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that "An idol is nothing at all in the world" and that "There is no God but one." <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

<sup>7</sup> But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

<sup>9</sup> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup> So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. <sup>12</sup> When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

### **Knowledge is important but . . . Love is essential**

I don't know if there is a more appropriate passage for us to turn to at this point in the letter than 1 Corinthians 8. It is a passage directed toward those whose hearts are wrong. Here Paul addresses the intelligent but unloving.

It has been challenging for me to study this passage. Meditating on these first three verses has caused me to realize how many statements I make each day that are not motivated first and foremost by love. It has caused me to pray that God would remind me to love each person I encounter and to seek to build up each individual with my words.

When I first started preaching here at 4Cs I was very concerned that I got the content right, to do as the Bible says - to "Rightly divide the word of truth." This is still a high value for me of course. But over time in the pulpit in these past 13 years my desires and hopes have deepened.

I have a list of questions that a pastor friend gave me. It is a checklist that I regularly try to keep in mind when I am preparing to preach. I am "prone to wander," as the old hymn says. My motives for preaching can be very suspect if I do not guard my heart. The first two questions are especially relevant to the theme of this chapter:

Am I worried about what people think of my message or what God thinks? - Teach with fear.  
Am I accurately presenting this passage? - Teach with accuracy.  
Am I depending on the Holy Spirit's power or my own cleverness? - Teach with power.  
Do I genuinely love these people? - Teach with love.

*Also:*

*Have I applied this message to my own life? Teach with integrity.  
Will this message draw attention to me or to God? Teach with humility.  
Do the people really need this message? Teach with urgency.*

This seems obvious but perhaps not as common among preachers as you might think. Too many public speakers and performers and pastors are concerned about how we look, whether the congregation realizes how smart and studied we are, how entertaining and amusing we can be. We love to turn a phrase in a memorable way. I can honestly say that in my old age I more often simply pray as I step up here behind the pulpit pray, “God, you know how I love these people. Give me the right words to bring them closer to you.”

The sad thing is that knowledge tends to puff up, even in pastors. Knowledge tends to makes us come off as ‘know it all’s and in my business, that translates to “holier than thou” and that is a bad formula for my profession. Now, don’t get me wrong. I believe that a preacher needs to be very knowledgeable, to have spent hours in study. I want to know much more about the passage and its context than I present, but I tell you things not to look smart. In fact I believe that the most important quality of the preacher is not so much his brains but his or her heart. If they don’t love their congregation and desire them to first and foremost know the truth that will set them free to fall deeper in love with Christ, what’s the point?

“Puffy knowledge” seems to have broken out in this little church in Corinth. There are some apparently who have decided that they had special knowledge that they are free to eat foods that have been sacrificed to other gods and feel confident enough about their opinion that they are acting proud and superior to others in the church. Paul is noticing in their questions that there is too much pride about what people think they know and not enough love and compassion and self-sacrificing evident in this fellowship. And Jesus and Christ agree that it is love that differentiates Christians from their spiritual peers.

**John 13:34-35** <sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

**John 15:12-14** <sup>12</sup> “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Later in chapter 13 of this same letter to Corinth Paul will write:

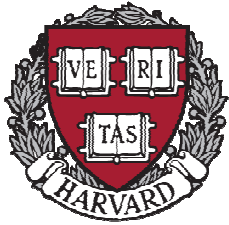
**1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. <sup>13</sup> So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

In a different translation, Paul puts it like this, “**Knowledge makes you arrogant, but love edifies.**” This is one of the most powerful one-liners about Christian community found anywhere in Paul’s letters. Paul’s point is: Those Corinthians that are ***boasting of their freedom*** to eat meat sacrificed to idols are acting arrogantly, without demonstrating love and respect for their brothers and sisters. Yet the real aim of Christianity should not be knowledge but love. Knowledge apart from love makes one prideful. A famous preacher used to say, “Some Christians grow; others just swell.”

In 1692, Harvard College adopted as its motto *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*—“Truth for Christ and the Church.”



Its crest showed three books, one face down to symbolize the limitation of human knowledge. But in recent decades the motto has been changed simply to *Veritas*—"Truth."



This means it is the pursuit of knowledge without the love of Christ at the center. What's the point?

As bad as puffed up knowledge is Paul is actually worried about something far worse.

### Stumbling Blocks

Paul is concerned that this so called superior knowledge and the sense of entitlement and personal rights that goes with it is creating **stumbling blocks** of faith in the Christians in the church who are new in their journey of faith.

**1 Cor. 8:9** <sup>9</sup> But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

**Romans 14:13** Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

**Matthew 23:13** "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because with your knowledge you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; you do not enter in yourselves, and you create a stumbling block for those seeking to go in.

### It is right to give up your rights

Christ's interest in the weaker brother is greater than His interest in you exercising your freedom. Paul acknowledges that we have "liberty" in Christ. Christian liberty is one of the central truths of the New Testament, yet, it is possible to use our liberty and become a "stumbling block" to the weak. A "stumbling block" is not an act that offends a person; it is an act that leads a fellow believer into what is sin for him or her. A stumbling block is not just anything that causes someone to be offended. It is not a stumbling block for a man to have long hair and a ponytail, if the people who are offended by this are not thereby tempted to have a ponytail themselves, and in so doing violate their conscience.

As Christians, we are free in Christ—free to engage in social practices and customs not specifically forbidden by biblical commands. Yet, the Holy Spirit may prompt us to refrain from some legitimate practices. The principle of love must take precedence over the principle of liberty. Paul explains here that we are not only responsible for ourselves but for one another. To put a spin on the words of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

### ***Am I my brother's keeper?***

Paul will insist, “*You are your brother's keeper.*” You do have a responsibility to look out for your brother's welfare.

In the Christian life we have been given great freedom, and with freedom comes . . . \_\_\_\_\_ . . . that's right “responsibilities.” There are certain potential danger spots that can cause a serious accident between brothers and sisters in Christ. In this passage, we have a dangerous intersection concerning meat offered to idols. Paul knew he had had perfect freedom to eat meat offered to idols. He knew that there was only one true God and that idols were nothing. Eating meat offered to them was neither right nor wrong. But not all believers felt that way. A person who had a ‘weak conscience’ believed that the meat was defiled by the idol, and therefore it was off limits. Paul recognized the need to take special care, lest by eating he would influence such a person to eat, thus violating his conscience. Concern for weaker believers kept him from exercising his liberty.

The expressions “there is no such thing as an idol” and “there is no God but one” (8:4) are slogans the Corinthians apparently used to justify their behavior. Paul agrees with the slogans in part, but corrects them to show how the Corinthians have misused these ideas. He explains that even though idols are fictitious gods, nevertheless, people ascribe worship to them (vs. 5). Yet, Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is only one God worthy of worship—God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The way the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are spoken of together here is a clear indication of the deity of Christ. Calling Jesus “Lord” is a way of affirming His deity and oneness with Yahweh. Paul is arguing that in the same way that the Godhead is one, we should seek to be one in the body of Christ. This requires understanding that love is more important than freedom, because *you are your brother's keeper.*

[YFC and alcohol]

### **We limit our freedom for the sake of love.**

The Bible places the burden on the strong. The sin is not in exercise of your liberty, but in exercising your liberty at the expense of fellow believers. If somebody else might be hurt spiritually, a strong Christian should give up the freedom to participate. The highest principle governing my choice in disputable matters is love for a fellow believer who might disagree with me on that issue.

Giving up my freedoms sounds like I live a boring, joyless life—I may never enjoy my liberties in Christ because somebody might be hurt. Paul's teaching requires that I defer to those who may be close by or to those who may see my actions and be hurt by them. If I deferred to all Christians everywhere, I probably would not even get out of bed in the morning! On every doubtful issue there is a weak Christian somewhere who believes my actions or ideas are sinful. It is unlikely that they all attend my church or are in my circle of acquaintances. My responsibility is to love those nearby who disagree with me and to respect the consciences of other Christians with whom I come in contact.

### **Christ offers us *His* meal and we renounce ourselves**

### **Prayer of Confession**

Father, don't let us fool ourselves and imagine that we know so much. Maybe we don't know anything at all. Maybe some of us have been using our knowledge to tear our brother down and hurt that brother for whom Christ died. Let's not be guilty of the Corinthian error.

So I'm asking God even right now that You would give us love for others. *Oh, God, let me believe what I'm saying.* Father, Help us to dwell on Christ. We want to become like him, Father. Give us love. I pray

that my brothers and sisters reading this chapter have been built up and encouraged, believing they can do great things in Christ. I pray that they feel strengthened to love one another.

God, forgive us for the careless statements we make that may have destroyed or weakened our brothers and sisters and hurt them and not motivated them to greater intimacy with You and deeper into their ministry to which you have called them. Use our knowledge. May we think hard about your Word, and may we think hard about people. May we think hard about our brothers and sisters, and may we think hard about those who are lost and headed for an eternity apart from you.

<b>Communion</b>
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