

Week 8, 1 Corinthians 8

Hook



Main Point: Knowledge of God leads to a love of God and others.

Group Activity

What would you give up for someone you love? In Southern Israel in the year 2012, a couple was faced with that very question when a woman brought home 550 adopted kittens. Understandably her husband took issue with the herd of kittens; he complained that they blocked his entrance to certain rooms in the house, they swarmed the kitchen and constantly took food off of the dining room table. At his wit's end, the husband threatened his wife with divorce. The couple sought reconciliation, but no matter what areas of compromise might have been reached, the success or failure of the marriage inevitably came back to one question: "Will you give up your cats for me?"

The woman chose the cats and the couple divorced.¹

Has anyone ever asked you to give something up for him or her? How did you respond?

What are some hobbies, behaviors or preferences that you would have trouble giving up for someone you loved?

In what ways should faith in Jesus motivate believers to sacrifice for the sake of others?

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/24/cat-divorce-israeli-man-d_n_1543234.html

Week 8, 1 Corinthians 8

Book

Main Point: Knowledge of God leads to a love of God and others.

Text Summary: 1 Corinthians 8

Paul addresses here another concern of the Corinthian Christians: What is Paul's stance regarding the eating of meat that has been used in idol sacrifices/worship? Paul takes a stance in agreement that yes, there is only one God and idols are imaginary. He explains that there is nothing wrong with eating meat; it will not bring you closer to or further away from the Lord. However, those Christians who are new to the faith have not yet learned to distinguish fully between what is proper for living under the lordship of Christ and what is not. They see certain Christians eating meat used for idol sacrifice and they are led to believe that as a follower of Christ, one can continue to worship other idols. Paul urges these "stronger" Christians to realize Christ achieved freedom for His children by giving up His own and because of that, we use our freedom to build the community of faith up, not destroy it, confuse it, or divide it.

1 Corinthians 8:1–6 [Read]

Sub-point: Knowledge of God should create love in His people, not pride.

Chapter 8 of Paul's letter revisits an issue within the Corinthian church: their pride. The Christians prided themselves on the knowledge they received. They were taking great joy in the freedom they now experienced as Christians. As such, they believed their freedom allowed them to act in any way they wanted. These particular "strong" Christians were not looking out for anyone but themselves. Paul has already addressed the issue of pride and what it does to the community. Rather than arrogance and destruction, the freedom experienced in Christ should give way to serving each other,² something Paul will work out further in this chapter.

Verse 1 addresses the question that the Corinthians had asked: What is Paul's stance regarding the eating of meat that has been used in idol sacrifices/worship? Pagan sacrifices so infiltrated Roman society; it would be difficult for people in Corinth to completely avoid some form of contact with it. Meat offered during sacrifices to false gods would have been separated into three parts: one to be burned up, one to be given to the priest and one to be given to the individual who offered the sacrifice. The meat that was given to the priest that he did not use would often be taken to the meat market. Further, this meat would end up on the menu of pagan neighbor's dinners, at pagan festivals, and private events held at pagan temples. So believers were faced with a series of potential questions: Is meat sacrificed to idols spiritually

² Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing.

contaminated? If the meat is clean, where is it appropriate for the believer to eat it? Even if the Christian has no issue with eating the meat, what about the effect his eating has on a Christian brother who has misgivings about it?³

Paul quotes a phrase in verse 1 that is used by the Corinthians: “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” that Paul speaks about is the fact that idols are not real gods, they possess no power, cannot tamper with meat; animals belong to God and so there is no issue with the meat itself. However, this knowledge has led to arrogance in the Corinthian church; knowledge of freedom without care for others can be dangerous. Love, however, builds up.

Sadly, what they claim to know is incomplete. They don’t understand why certain liberties are in place. They don’t yet understand their freedom is meant for more than their own pleasure and selfish gain. All they care about is what they know and what that affords them. Knowledge, or *gnosis* in the Greek, was a Corinthian buzzword used to parade superiority.⁴

These Christians’ theology is not leading them to right practice. What they know is not affecting how they live. Knowledge of God should create love in us, not pride. A love for God demonstrates that one is known by God and if one truly loves God, it will be expressed in a love for others (1 John 4:20).

Verses 4–6 show Paul’s stance a bit more clearly. Paul shows that there are no other gods but the one true God. Idols are nothing. Paul uses a creedal formula to bring in the nature of Christ’s divinity (verse 6). “This is strong monotheism that incorporates the deity of Jesus Christ into the definition of God.”⁵ Paul wants to show that idols are worthless and of no account and it is God, through Christ, who has made all things and for whom all things are made. We exist to love and serve God, not to obtain elite status by the knowledge we possess. Paul’s language in verse 6 is a reminder and reformulation of the ancient Shema, found in Deuteronomy 6:4, that the Lord our God is one, not many.

What was the knowledge that was causing some of the Corinthians to boast?

How were these Corinthian believers using their new freedom in Christ incorrectly?

How does one pursue knowledge without becoming “puffed up”?

1 Corinthians 8:7–13 [Read]

Sub-point: Believers are called to lay down liberties for the sake of others.

³ Gaebelien, Frank E. [1984] *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: volume 10*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 238.

⁴ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 114.

⁵ Taylor, Mark [2014] *New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, p. 206.

The problem here in Corinth is that not all believers fully grasp their new lifestyle in Christ. This is the foundation of Paul's argument. Those who are living in freedom are causing confusion and misunderstanding for those who have recently moved from lives of worshipping pagan idols. Those new to the faith, by example of the "stronger" Christians, are being led to believe that Christians can worship Christ and other gods. Vang writes, "When they see the 'strong' eat meat, they conclude it is possible to worship Christ and idol gods at the same time. This leads them away from Christ and back into sin."⁶

Paul tries to get these believers to see that food isn't the issue. The issue is what is being done with the liberty found in Christ. Instead of laying down personal freedom to serve the greater body, these Corinthians are using their freedom to serve themselves and cause disunity, leading new Christians astray. The truth, as commentators point out, is that "genuine knowledge of Christ causes a believer to consider how personal behavior affects the faith of fellow believers. Christian love and care for others must trump personal rights."⁷

The Christian's new freedom exists in a new reality. And that reality is one centered on the community rather than the mere individual. Paul urges these believers to live in ways that build up the body of Christ. One commentator puts it this way: "It's not a question of what one can or can't do, but how to serve and live in a way that makes the gospel compelling."⁸

Paul can call these Christians to this way of life because of what he writes in his letter to the Philippians. Christ gave up all his rights for His Bride so that we could be free. In response, we give up our own to serve others, following Christ's example. In Christ, "the stronger brother gave up his rights in order for the weaker brother to have liberty."⁹ Paul's connection to Christ and to the community shows, in verse 12, that the believer's sin is not in isolation. When believers wound and sin against another, they do so to Christ. Paul wants to show how deeply life within the Church is connected to Christ and to others.

The goal for these Christians is to observe their lives and the way they are living and ask themselves whether their actions reflect more of Christ or more of their own sin. Vang explains, "The knowledge of the Corinthian elites sought to destroy community, where knowledge of Christ and from Christ builds up the community."¹⁰ Paul wants them to see the reality that "exercising personal freedom is never simply personal."¹¹

⁶ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 156.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Vang, Preben [2014] *Teaching the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, p. 115.

¹¹ Um, Stephen T. [2015] *Preaching the Word Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 155.

Christians are truly free only when they set aside their freedoms for others.¹² This is what Christ did for us. This is what we must do for those around us. Food, Paul says, does nothing for us in our relationship to God. It can't bring us to Him. Food isn't the issue. It's the problem of our head and heart not connecting with our actions. Don't let our desires come before serving and encouraging others along in their faith. Our mission is to help, not to hinder. And because Christ has done it for us, we can do it for others. So Paul concludes this section by stating that if his choice of food, which has such little value, causes a brother to sin, he is willing to give meat up. Why? Because it's worth it.

Why does Paul say sinning against each other is sinning against Christ in verse 12?

How should a believer view his "rights"?

What "rights" do believers exercise today that cause division?

¹² Ibid., 157.

Week 8, 1 Corinthians 8

Took



Main Point: Knowledge of God leads to a love of God and others.

Group Activity:

Allow Paul's example to inspire you to greater acts of love. An understanding of who God is should promote believers to give up everything for the sake of the Gospel, laying down freedoms in hope that one more might come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. On a sheet of paper write the following: "For Jesus, I would give up _____." This week, ask the Lord to bring to mind areas of your life that might be impeding your opportunity to serve the body and introduce Jesus to the lost; ask Him to help you fill in the blank. Examples include music, certain films, alcohol, food choices, etc.

Lesson Conclusion: Not every Christian in Corinth knew how his or her life was supposed to look different after following Christ. Instead of helping those along who were new to the family of faith, those "mature" believers were boasting in the freedom Christ achieved for them by removing the law and living in ways that led others into sin. These stronger Christians didn't surrender their liberties in order to instruct and help these newer believers. They lived arrogantly and recklessly. Paul instructs them that this isn't the way to live. The way of the Cross is the way of giving up rights for the sake of other brothers and sisters. Paul explains that sometimes the right thing, the free thing, may be the wrong thing to do.

Challenge

Thank God that He, through Christ, gave up His rights and His freedom to come down and pay the ultimate price for your freedom and liberty from sin. This should breathe gratitude into our souls daily when we reflect on all that Christ gave up for us. This should challenge our thoughts any time we think we are better than anyone or anytime we believe we are free to do whatever we want. Know that Christ was free, too, and He chose to give it up for us.

Ask yourself if your actions reflect the love of Christ. Ask yourself if how you live is the way that God calls us to live within His family. Ask yourself if you are taking too much joy in certain

freedoms rather than joy in the ultimate freedom that Christ has brought. Reflect on how your choices might affect others.

Practice this week on finding ways to serve those around you. Remember that love never acts in a way that causes others to stumble. Find out how you can display Christlike love to those in your home, your job, your church, your classroom. Let your knowledge of Christ fuel your love for those around you.

Contributors: Leanne Jamieson, David White