

Knowledge, Freedom, And Constraint – 1 Cor 8:1-13

1 Cor 8; This is the 29th message in our Issues series from this book, and after today we'll be halfway through

But before we get to the text, I want to briefly **review** the situation surrounding this letter
You might recall that the church in Corinth (**map**) was founded by the apostle Paul around 50AD while on his 2nd missionary journey . . .
And after staying there about 18 months, he eventually made his way to Ephesus, across the Aegean Sea – where 3 years later he wrote this letter to the church in Corinth
And he did so to address their issues *****

You see, Corinth was a thriving metropolis, sophisticated through and through
But it was also secular and sinful through and through
So much so, that the church struggled with its *own* purity
Which is the very reason Paul wrote – to address their issues, and urge them to live as the church in the world, without the world in the church

And his letter has been preserved that we might do the same
That we would learn from their mistakes and avoid their issues, in order to live as the church in *our* world, without the world in our church

- Which brings us to chapter 8 and the *issue* of food offered to idols (**Background**)
The background of which is that there were a bunch of temples in and around Corinth, like the temple of Aphrodite on the mountain overlooking the city . . .
Where the people and priests offered animal sacrifices to their various deities, and then used the meat for banquets, or sold it in the marketplace to be used in homes
All of which led to questions on the part of the church, regarding their freedom or lack thereof, in eating it; That's the background

And with that in mind, I first want to walk through the **text** with you, and make some comments – to help you understand what he's saying, and catch the flow of thought
Then, we'll go back and put it all together, with 3 principles for our lives

- So v1 says – *Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.”*
Given the fact that this is the same verbiage he used in 7:1 to respond to one of their questions, it's likely he's doing the same here

So quoting them, he says – *we know that “all of us possess knowledge”*
Which at first glance seems to indicate that he agrees with them on that note
But when you put it together with v7 where he says – *Not all possess this knowledge*, you get the idea that's not the case; he's not agreeing with them

Rather, I think he's temporarily conceding the point here in v1, in order to point out a problem with it – namely, that knowledge tends to puff us up
Which is what he says next – *This “knowledge” [that everybody supposedly has] puffs up, but love builds up*

Now, in that one little statement, he frames the core of the issue
And it's not about eating food sacrificed to idols

It's the tension between knowledge and love
Which leaves us a bit puzzled, until he explains himself by drawing out the implications

One of which he states immediately in v2 – *If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.*
You think you know what you need to know, especially about *this* issue?
Think again Paul says; You don't

3 *But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.*
Skipping a world of explanation and connecting material, he cuts right to the chase to basically say . . .
The Christian life is not about knowledge, but love; love for God and love for others
Why? B/c that leads to God knowing *us*; It leads to God having knowledge of *us*
If anyone *loves* God, not just knows about him, but *loves* him – he is known by God

That's not to say that knowledge of God isn't important to the Christian life; It is
In fact, Isaiah looked forward to the day when the whole *earth* would be *full of the knowledge of the Lord* (Is 11:9)
Knowledge *is* important; But not for knowledge sake; Not as an end in and of itself
The end or goal of knowledge is love; And the result of love is being loved – by God

- Then, in v4, having framed the larger issue, he returns to the issue at hand and starts drawing some conclusions, saying . . .
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.”
Two pieces of knowledge that Paul affirms as important regarding idol food

And then he explains those 2 pieces of knowledge
5 *For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—*
Referring to both earthly *and* spiritual powers and authorities
Some of whom are imaginary, and some real; Some mere idols, and some demons
Some earthly rulers who are lords, and some people who think they are

Although there are many so-called gods, v6 – *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.*

So in spite of the fact that there are other earthly and spiritual powers, real *and* imagined – none of them are God, none of them are equal to God, and none of them matter
It's from God, for God, and through God we live and move and have our being
So even if there *is* a devil behind every bush as some are want to see – so what?
They're not God, they're not equal to God, and none of them matter

- 7 *However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol [as if it really means something], and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.*
IOW some believers in Corinth were not fully convinced that idols were nothing, and that the food offered to them was just food
Their convictions were not yet solidified and strong

So when they ate food that had been offered to an idol, they thought they were re-indulging in idol worship, which defiled or corrupted their conscience
All b/c they either didn't know the truth, or didn't fully embrace it

To which Paul responds by saying – 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.*
Our eating, or lack thereof, has no bearing on our standing with God
Unless of course, by not eating you fail to take care of yourself, temple of the HS that you are – that doesn't please him
But short of that, food has no bearing on pleasing or displeasing the Lord

• 9 *But take care that this right of yours [the freedom you have] does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple [i.e. you who know there's nothing wrong with it], will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak to eat food offered to idols?*
If his knowledge of the truth is lacking, or his convictions as to what's right and what's wrong are shaky – will he not be tempted to do what he thinks is wrong? He will

11 *And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed [as in they suffer the consequences and ill-effects of sin], the brother for whom Christ died.*
12 *Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*
To sin against a brother or sister in Christ this way, is to sin against Christ himself

13 *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble [i.e. fail in his walk with the Lord and life of holiness], I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*
That's love; Coming full circle to v1

And that's the text; From which we get 3 **principles** for life
The first, from v4-9, is that . . .

Knowledge of the truth leads to freedom (v4-6, 8-9)
Something we're *well* familiar with when it comes to the gospel
You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free Jesus said
Free from the bondage of sin and its consequences

We're well familiar with this principle when it comes to the gospel
But maybe not so much when it comes to knowing the truth about idols, and God, and material things

However, if you know there's *no God but one*, and that idols have *no real existence*, like v4 says – it leads to freedom; freedom to eat food offered to them
B/c there's nothing wrong with food, no matter what it's been used for
It has no bearing on our acceptance by God, or his grace toward us (v8)
And the same is true of other material things

• That's why you can walk into a restaurant that has a statue of Buddha sitting there, and eat the food with a clean conscience
B/c it's just food; And the statue is just wood, or stone, or whatever
It's not real, and represents nothing real
Even if it's used by demonic forces to deceive and blind those who worship it

Those forces are still not God, their power pales in comparison to God's, and the food in no way is tainted by their influence
Which means there's freedom to eat it

• Or take a night club in St. Vincent that's used to promote sin of various kinds
Is it okay to rent it and have church in it like Al Blake is doing with Harvest down there? Absolutely; There's freedom in that, b/c the building in and of itself has no moral essence; It's neutral
So knowledge of that *truth* leads to freedom – freedom in life, and freedom in ministry

But take care, and this is the main caveat from v9 – take care that this *right* of yours, this freedom you have, does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak; B/c . . .

Knowledge with love leads to restraint (v7,10-13)

That's the second principle
Knowledge informs love, yes; But love *tempers* knowledge, and leads to restraint
That's the bottom line of this whole chapter, stated in v13 – *if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*
Or as he says in Rom 14:21 – *It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.*

So out of concern for my brother and sister in Christ Paul says, I won't exercise my right
Or, to put it positively, he *will* exercise restraint; And we should too
Out of love for one another, we too should exercise restraint in our freedoms

Otherwise . . .

1. We might tempt a weaker brother (v10)

It's the first of 7 reasons in this passage, why we should exercise restraint
V10 says – *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged [or tempted], if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?*
He will; He'll be tempted to do that which violates his conscience
So knowledge with love, love for one another, leads to restraint, b/c it might tempt a weaker brother

2. We might cause a weaker brother to sin (v7)

B/c according to v7, some *fall* to those temptations, and do the very thing they think is wrong; which defiles their conscience

3. We might wreck their life (v11)

V11 says – *By your knowledge this weak person is destroyed*
We should exercise restraint in order to preserve/protect them from the ill-effects of sin

I was watching one of those shows recently about how things work . . .

And they were explaining how mine shafts are sometimes stabilized, by infusing glue into the ceilings
Every few feet, they drill a 3 foot hole up into the rock, and insert a long tube of glue, followed by a massive screw
And as that screw goes in, it forces the glue outward, into the crevices of the rock that forms the ceiling of the mine shaft
IOW they *infuse* the rock with glue – thereby stabilizing it, and restraining it

Which I think is a perfect picture of what *we* need to do with our *knowledge*

We need to infuse it with love, so as to restrain our freedom

And do so as if lives depend on it, just like the miners

Otherwise, we might wreck the lives of those around us

4. We sin against the Lord (v12)

If we fail to infuse our knowledge with love, we sin against the Lord

This is the main point of v12 – *sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*

Jesus himself is wronged

Failing to exercise restraint in your freedom, actually sins against the one who gave you that freedom in the first place

5. We sin against them (v12)

That's one of the thoughts in v12 that he makes in passing – *Thus, sinning against your brothers . . . you sin against Christ.*

If love doesn't temper our knowledge and restrain our license – we sin against our fellow believers

Whether it's drinking in front of someone who's a former alcoholic . . .

Or gambling with the knowledge of those who struggle – we wrong them

6. We might damage their conscience (v12)

Again, this is from v12 where he refers to us *wounding their conscience when it is weak*

Making it even more difficult for them to determine right and wrong, or scarring them for a long time to come

7. We tear them down (v1)

The opposite of what real love does, which according to v1, *builds up* *****

Knowledge of the truth leads to freedom

But knowledge with love, knowledge *infused* with love, leads to restraint

Not b/c we have to, but b/c we want to out of love for our brother and sister in Christ

And then last, the third principle, coming full circle to v1-3, is that . . .

Knowledge alone leads to no good (v1-3)

No good like arrogance, delusion, and rejection

That's the idea from the outset of this passage

- That knowledge alone leads to **arrogance** – arrogance about yourself

Which we saw in v1 – “knowledge” puffs up

And when we fail to do something about it, the mineshaft of our lives gets more and more brittle, with more and more risk of a cave-in, and someone getting hurt

- Not only that, but knowledge alone also leads to **delusion** – as in, thinking you know more than you really do

That's v2 where Paul says – *If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.*

IOW about the time you think you've got it going on, you don't

You're deluding yourself; You're imagining things

Just like a desert wanderer imagines that there's an oasis, when it doesn't really exist

On the other hand, the *truly* knowledgeable person is *overwhelmed* w/ what they don't know

Or as someone once said, they've passed from the “*unconscious* state of ignorance, to the *conscious* state of ignorance” (MacArthur, 192; source unknown)

Just like the desert wander who reaches the oasis, only to find that's it's a mirage

He's passed from the unconscious state of ignorance, totally unaware of what he doesn't know, to the conscious state of ignorance

I gotta tell ya, that's how I feel these days

The more I know about the Bible, the more I realize I don't know, and the more inadequate I feel

Which is not all bad I suppose, b/c it keeps me both humble and hungry – hungry to learn more; and I know some of you feel the same way

And it's a good place to be, b/c knowledge alone, knowledge without awareness, knowledge without humility – leads to delusion

- The worst part of which, is that it also leads to **rejection** – rejection by God
V3 says – *if anyone loves God, he is known by God*
Which means the converse is also true – if anyone *doesn't* love God, if all they have is knowledge of him, and knowledge alone, they won't be known by him
They'll be rejected; And that's no good
Knowledge alone leads to no good *****

Better to know the truth that leads to freedom – the truth *about* Christ that leads to freedom *in* Christ . . .

While infusing your knowledge with the love of Christ . . .

So as to restrain yourself for the sake of your brother, and be accepted by God for the sake of your soul

Pray – Open our eyes to the truth; Free us from past bondage; Help us to infuse our knowledge with love; And rid us of the pride that leads to no good

The cry of our heart is to bring you praise