

1Co14 – Knowledge Versus Love– 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

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Open your Bibles. Great message today in 1 Corinthians Chapter 8. We are going to do the entire chapter. Title of the message, “Knowledge Versus Love.”

As Christians I think our highest horizontal blessing is our fellowship with other believers. Our highest vertical blessing is our deep fellowship with God, our love for God, our communion with God.

But our highest horizontal blessing is the fellowship that we have with one another, with other believers. In fact much of what draws people to a church family is the depth and value of the fellowship they have with other believers.

God uses our fellowship with other believers to accomplish big eternal things. God accomplishes big Kingdom work, eternal work, through our deep fellowship with other believers.

In April of 1992, two couples and their six young children were driving down the road together after attending a particularly disappointing Easter service (the message was about how to reduce stress in your life) and one said, “We should just start our own church.”

And in November of 1992 we had our first church service. Twenty-six years later, through that relationship and the deep fellowship that God created in that relationship, three churches have been directly started by those two couples. From those three churches, at least five or six other churches have been planted. And so out of the eight churches that have come from that relationship the teaching of the Word has gone out to thousands and thousands – beyond what we could ever imagine here through our Word By Mail ministry. More salvations than we could have ever dreamt of came out of that relationship.

And that day changed two families’ lives forever. We had no idea how much God had in store and how much change was about to take place in our lives.

My point is this. Your relationship with other believers has eternal impact and eternal consequences. It matters. It matters greatly. The deep fellowship we have with other believers is the highest horizontal blessing we have as Christians, and that’s what Paul is getting across in Chapter 8.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, please allow us to see the priority that you put on our relationships with each other. Allow us God, to know that what we're doing and with whom and how we're doing it and how other people view what we're doing, Lord, it matters. There's an eternal impact in our actions within our relationships with one another. Show us today the phenomenal immeasurable priority of love over knowledge when it comes to our relationships with each other. Do it for your glory, Lord. And for your name, amen.*

It's not just that our fellowship with other believers is our highest horizontal blessing... but Jesus said in John 13:35,

John 13:35 (NLT)

35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Our love for one another will prove to the world that we are true Christ followers? That's what Jesus said! That command to "love one another" could easily be made into a year's worth of sermons, couldn't it?

But today (in 1 Corinthians Chapter 8) Paul is going to dive into this subject of how we relate to one another and specifically address "Christian Liberty" and how one believer's liberty (freedom) can positively or negatively affect other believers around him from an eternal perspective. And he's going to develop this truth through multiple examples in order to get this incredibly important point across to us...

How we love one another will prove to the world that we are true followers of Jesus Christ, and Paul is talking about our "sacrificial love" for the other believers God has put around us. He's not talking about "liking" a few people in the church and not worrying about the rest of them. Instead, what God is after in these chapters is that we commit to show *true sacrificial love* toward every believer that we come in contact with. It's a love where we esteem one another higher than ourselves, as Philippians 2 says that we sacrifice something of ourselves for the benefit of the believers around us. We commit to true sacrificial love to those around us for the good of Christ, for the cause of Christ, for the Kingdom of God. It's a big deal – how we relate and how people view us and how our actions impact them have eternal consequences.

In his comments on this chapter, **Alan Redpath** says:

Alan Redpath: *I believe that the greatest soul-winning help in the whole world is UNITY among believers. Likewise the greatest hindrance to soul-winning is division in the Christian church. Therefore our fellowship in the Lord carries with it a tremendous responsibility.*

I don't know that we *grasp* that. I don't know that we really think that how we interact and how other people feel about our actions has such a tremendous eternal responsibility. How we handle our fellowship with one another matters and it has eternal consequences.

Remember, Paul is answering questions written to him from the church in Corinth and he's answering in a way he knows these issues are already causing disagreement and division in the church. So – he's answering the questions. But he is also teaching much larger truths *as* he answers them.

And so, in Chapter 8 Paul answers the next question.

1 Corinthians 8:1 (NLT)

1 Now regarding your question about food that has been offered to idols. Yes, we know that “we all have knowledge” about this issue. But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church.

From this verse you *might* think this is about food that has been offered to *idols*, but it's not. That is just an *example*, an *illustration* from the first century in Corinth. God's instruction here is not *specifically* (or exclusively) about *food* that has been offered to *idols*. It has a much broader application and an application that is critically important to us today.

So, in regard to this subject, Paul says, (second sentence) ***Yes, we know that “we all have knowledge” about this issue.***

It seems like this might have been a common saying in the church in Corinth and Paul seems to be repeating it back to them a bit “tongue in cheek.” Like - *yeah, yeah, I know “we all have knowledge” about this issue.*

Then verse 1 says ***But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church*** (that is a great line).

This verse is more familiar to us in the literal translation. In the ESV it says,

1 Corinthians 8:1 (ESV)

1 . . . This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.

Paul is dealing with a minor matter that is causing division in the church and he begins by saying (gently) just because you “*know it all*” doesn't mean you're helping the church “*at all*.” In fact your knowledge may well be puffing you up and you may be about to explode with all that “*puffy pride*.”

Guys, *KNOWLEDGE* doesn't build the church up. *LOVE* builds the church up and all that the "puffed up" knowledge does is *tear down* and *divide* the church, it undermines the church. Love builds up, strengthens and edifies the church.

In fact 1 Corinthians 8:2-3 says,

1 Corinthians 8:2-3 (NLT)

2 Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. 3 But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.

God is *not* impressed with knowledge that puffs up. So stick a pin in it. God recognizes the one who loves not the one with knowledge. The ESV says in verse 3 ***But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.***

He knows, he recognizes, he acknowledges the one who shows *love* not the one who "claims" to know all the answers.

What is Paul "leading into" here? What nerve is he poking at? Paul is addressing so called "mature believers" who feel they have the liberty to *do* certain things because of their *knowledge* about those things. But their *actions* coming from their so called "knowledge" about these things can easily make other Christians stumble or doubt or even put a hurdle (a roadblock) in the way of someone who is in the process of "*putting their faith in Christ*" or in their walk with Christ.

The example Paul is using is eating meat sacrificed to idols. But it would match today:
MOVIES that we watch
TELEVISION that we watch
CARD PLAYING (for money)
(and the big one) SOCIAL DRINKING.

And then there are minor DOCTRINAL (DOGMA) issues:

WHICH DAY of the week you attend church

WHICH BIBLE translation you use

WHETHER YOU accept or reject a guy with the same initials as **J**esus **C**hrist
and on and on and on.

These verses are not *specifically* (or exclusively) about eating meat that's been sacrificed to idols. These verses are about what *you and I do* every day that may be causing someone else (for whom Christ died) to stumble or struggle in their walk.

So, can you switch “eating meat offered to an idol” for something that you think is okay for a believer to do?

1 Corinthians 8:4-6 (NLT)

4 So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God.

5 There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords.

6 But for us, There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live.

On this matter we KNOW what we KNOW. We KNOW that an idol is no real thing. So we know *eating meat* offered to an idol is no real thing. Plus, *the meat is cheaper!* We know there’s only ONE God and ONE Lord, Jesus Christ and so our “walk” is not affected by this issue at all.

But – guess what? It’s just *not* about us!

It’s *not* about the fact that *we* are not affected by it

It’s *not* about how much *we know* about it.

It’s about the fact that there is another believer *watching us*.

Paul has just said – We *KNOW* what eating meat offered to an *idol* is *no big deal*... But 1 Corinthians 8:7 says,

1 Corinthians 8:7 (NLT)

7 However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated.

Wait a minute – are you saying I need to take into account how *someone else* sees what *I’m doing* as a believer. Are you saying I need to take into account what someone else *thinks* about what I’m doing?

Yeah – exactly – walking in “love for one another” is taking into account how someone else *feels* or *thinks* even when *you know* something is *not* a big deal. It’s not about what you know. It’s about how *what you do* is *affecting* another believer.

Paul clarifies this priority in our relationships in 1 Corinthians 8:8-9.

1 Corinthians 8:8-9 (NLT)

8 It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't lose anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do.

9 But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble.

In these minor matters of the faith how *you feel* about a certain issue – is *not* the issue. *The issue* is how are *your* actions (your freedoms) are affecting other believers – *who are watching you.*

1 Corinthians 8:10 (NLT)

10 For if others see you—with your “superior knowledge”—eating in the temple of an idol, won't they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol?

If we think we have “*superior knowledge*” on an issue and that “knowledge” gives us freedom in a certain area our “*superior knowledge*” cannot be the “*final say*” on whether we do something or not. The “*final say*” must be our *love and concern* for other believers around us – *and* for unbelievers.

And Paul drives this point home in 1 Corinthians 8:11.

1 Corinthians 8:11 (NLT)

11 So because of your superior knowledge (so called), a weak believer for whom Christ died will be destroyed.

“***Destroyed***”?? Because you “know it all” – *a weak believer for whom Christ died* – will be ***DESTROYED***? The word can also be translated “ruined” and we assume Paul is talking about a New believer’s walk – about their *growing relationship* with Jesus Christ and about if you – in your (supposed) “*superior knowledge*” act in a way that *ruins* – or even *destroys* a “weak” believers *growing faith* in Christ... then that is a *serious problem* and God sees it as a *serious problem*.

Look at 1 Corinthians 8:12

1 Corinthians 8:12 (NLT)

12 And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ.

WHOA – sinning against Christ... YIKES!

I wasn't encouraging anyone to do anything. I was just doing what I was personally "okay with."

Yeah – but that other believer was *watching you* and your actions were something that they believe are wrong. And Paul is saying (in verse 10) that your actions were ***encouraging them to violate their conscience*** which may cause them to *stumble* in their faith.

The ESV says here you are ***“Wounding (damaging) their weak conscience”*** by doing something *they* believe is wrong and verse 12 calls that a *sin* against Christ because what is done to someone who *belongs to Christ* is done *to* Christ. So – *why* would you want to ***“sin against Christ”*** over some minor issue?

Remember – we're talking about *minor issues* here. Paul's example from Corinth is eating meat that's been offered to an idol (*not an American Idol*). Our examples would be (again) MOVIES – TV – MUSIC – or “Worldly activities” and of course the “always at the top of the list”... occasional single “social drink” with your favorite meal and as “knowledgeable” – “mature” Christians we come up with a dozen reasons why this is “okay for me.”

But here is what God's Word says to the Corinthians and to us.

1 Corinthians 8:13 (NLT)

13 So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble.

True spiritual maturity is saying ***“I will never do something that causes another believer to stumble”*** – that person is *too valuable* to the Lord and to me. No matter how much I “*know*” about a certain thing or how certain I am that certain thing is “okay for me” I will never do it – if it grieves another believer's conscience. Because the issue is *not* whether a certain thing is *okay* for me, the issue is my *love and concern* for the other believers around me.

It is said often: ***If Jesus Christ could DIE for the believers around me – then certainly I can sacrifice some MINOR thing for their good.***

Many of us have examples of this, don't we? And for many of us – it's when we exercised some “freedom” we felt we had *only to find out* that another believer was offended by our choice or our action. But still, don't we have the tendency to *justify* our

choices and actions? We tend to justify our choices and actions instead of seeing them as either building up or tearing down another believer's faith.

Guys, our *highest horizontal blessing* is our fellowship with other believers to accomplish big eternal things. So – shouldn't we put the *building up* of another believer at the top of our "*Why we do what we do*" list?

John 15:13 (ESV)

13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

When was the last time you said – "*I have the RIGHT to DO this, or SAY this – but for the sake of that other believer – I WON'T*" – "*Because THEIR WALK – is more important than MY RIGHTS.*"

When people start seeing you *love* like *that* it will *prove* that you are a *true follower of Jesus Christ*.

Let's pray. *Lord, Jesus, you wrote 1 Corinthians to get real. You had Paul write it to get real. We call it "Life As The Church" because every message is like – "oh Lord, this one's hard." We need you, Lord. We need you to crucify the supposed knowledge we have, this "higher knowledge" and allow us to be more concerned about how our actions impact other believers than our right to do something. And so we pray Lord, that you would give us more love, greater love, a deeper love for those around us Lord, that we would make our choices for their benefit. That we would sacrifice our own rights in order to strengthen them and encourage them and help them in their walk towards heaven. That our horizontal relationships with one another would be a crucial area that you are at work in for eternal kingdom size benefits. Please continue to transform us in our love for one another. Please continue to protect this body of believers from dissention, from disunity, from conflict, Lord. That each of us would sacrificially love one another, that we would prove to the world that we are genuine followers of you, Jesus, our Messiah and our Lord. Do it in us radically for your glory and in your name, amen.*