

“Your Freedom is Not the Issue – Love Through Knowledge is”

1 Corinthians 8

We’ve all heard the phrase “information/knowledge is power”. While there is some truth to that, the way knowledge is used today is often to hurt others. Information is used to belittle people. Parts of information are often used to persuade people to think the way others want you to think. That’s why false information is such a problem today. A little truth twisted into a lot of untruths often is used to make people look bad.

And followers of Jesus are not immune to using their knowledge to make themselves look good and others bad. We already saw in this letter how many of the Corinthian believers were caught up in wanting to be right; wanting to prove their opinion on something was correct. Because knowledge was everything in this Greek-influenced culture, it also permeated the body of Christ. Paul says this needs to change.

In 8:1 we move to another topic. The Corinthians sent Paul a letter we no longer have, concerning questions about living out their faith. Those questions are the best questions to ask, because when we follow Christ, our thinking needs to change and our behaviour needs to change. We just finished a lengthy session about marriage and singleness in Ch. 7. This next section actually stretches from here to Ch. 11. On the surface it seems to be about whether Christians should eat food sacrificed to idols or not. Some understood through knowledge that idols didn’t really exist so the food wasn’t really sacrificed to idols or pagan gods because they don’t exist. But not everyone felt that way. So Paul, are we free to eat this food or not? Paul’s answer was and is, the exercising of your freedom to eat or not to eat is not the issue. The real issue, how are you using your Christian knowledge to build others up in love?

The premise behind the question, ‘Can I eat food sacrificed to idols?’ is a somewhat selfish question. Life isn’t about you. Your life in Christ is all about Jesus being seen through you. The question should be, how will eating food sacrificed to idols show or not show that Jesus lives through me? Paul points out that the issue is a theological one, but some who believed they were more mature in the faith and had more spiritual knowledge were unaware or purposely uncaring that what they felt was their right as a believer, may not have been the right behaviour for a believer. So Paul points out the dangers of having lots of theological knowledge without loving theological discernment towards others. He starts the chapter,

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But the man who loves God is known by God.

Knowledge and Love Should be Partners **Not Opponents (8:1-3)**

There seems to be a disconnect in Christians when it comes to biblical knowledge, that somehow it doesn’t produce biblical love. Generally speaking, the more knowledge we have (even if it is about one subject) the more arrogant we can become because we think we know everything. None of us knows everything about even one thing, let alone all things. Sadly,

We often use knowledge insensitively (v.1)

'We know that we all possess knowledge' was probably a familiar statement in the Greek culture of Corinth. We've already talked about how this culture was infatuated with knowledge and trying to impress people with what they know. Unfortunately, we're all guilty of using our knowledge that we have that others may not have, to make people feel inferior. *'Don't you know that?' 'I can't believe you didn't know that?'* are ways of putting others down by exalting ourselves as if possessing this knowledge makes us superior to others. All it really shows is how unique we are because let's face it, we don't possess knowledge about things you might have knowledge about simply because it doesn't interest us. It's not a matter of who's smarter or superior, it's simply a sign that we're all wired differently and interested in different things.

Here in Corinth, Paul was concerned about using spiritual knowledge in an arrogant way.

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.

If you watched any of *The Chosen*, you may have noticed Gaius, the Roman Centurion had numerous idols in his house that he was burning incense/praying to for the healing of his boy. A similar scene is found in the movie *Risen*, where the main character, a Roman soldier, is often seen praying to different gods in his house. Many people offered sacrifices of food (not just meat) to idols to secure favour with these gods, praying that they would meet their current needs. Some of these accepted Christ as their Saviour. As they grow spiritually they gain knowledge that there is only one true God and that there are no other gods. So meat sacrificed to idols was really sacrificed to nothing. Therefore, their conscience was clear based on biblical knowledge for them to eat meat particularly that was sacrificed to a false god, but the excess was sold at the market.

Others did not share the same understanding. They believed that since idolatry is a sin therefore eating meat used for idolatrous practices is to participate in idolatry. As a result, the group that had no problem eating the meat used their knowledge to put down the others, while those who struggled to eat meat felt they were justified in judging their meat-eating brothers. So who's right Paul? You're both wrong says Paul because you're both feeling your right based on knowledge, and both of you are hurting the other. Aren't we all followers of Jesus? This is what Paul draws them back to:

² The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But the man who loves God is known by God.

Paul says you're both missing a major point. Stop measuring yourself by what you know over the other, look at the fact that you are known by God.

Being known by God should result in loving others (vv.2-3)

When Paul says we are 'known by God' He is referring to our salvation which had nothing to do with our knowledge or good works. Being known by God is humbling. 'Wow, God saved me? Even though I was such a sinner. God chose to reveal the gospel truth to me?' Don't be arrogant Paul says. None of us deserved salvation. God rescued you. God saved you. Every kilobyte of information stuck in your brain is due to God. The fact that your brain even functions properly is from God. Who are we to use our God-given gifts and understanding to mistreat our brothers and sisters in Christ?

The more we understand how God has known us and knows us continually [emphasis of the word], the more humbled we should be which should result in loving others based on our love for

God. To love God is to love others. So Paul, how does this apply in this situation between these believers divided over whether it's okay or not okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols?

Our Knowledge of God Needs to Inform Our Minds and Transform our Lives (8:4-6)

⁴ 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. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), ⁶ 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.

When we get saved we realize there is only one True God, the God of Israel, the father of Jesus Christ who exists and is co-equal to His Father along with the Holy Spirit. Paul is referring to Deut. 6:4-5,

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Tie, keep impressing this knowledge of God [the Lord is one], and may it transform your life [love God mentally and physically]. Jesus will summarize this as loving God and love others. Why? While many others claim there are other gods, the God in the Bible is the only God and everything comes from Him and He is the One for whom we live. It's all about God, it's never about us. It's all about God, it's never about us.

And He created everything and sustains everything through his Son Jesus and it is through Him we live because when we're saved Christ dwells inside us. When we judge each other or when we use our knowledge to feel superior over another we are hurting Christ Himself because Jesus dwells in them too.

'Do you want some real knowledge to chew on and feel good about? Chew on the fact that no one is superior to any other since all of you are ones in whom Christ dwells. And how is Christ supposed to show through us? As servants. As those who sacrifice their life for the other out of love.

The issue isn't meat sacrificed to idols; the issue isn't hymns and choruses or bible translations or going to movies or playing cards or drinking or vaccines. The issue is are you going to relinquish your rights to act like you do based on your convictions so that another believer who may not agree with you on these issues is not offended by your 'superior knowledge'? Paul exhorts us

Don't Exercise Your Spiritual Freedoms if its Going to Hinder Another's Spiritual Growth (8:7-13)

Paul focuses his attention on the 'mature' believers, the ones with the "superior knowledge".

⁷ But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?

The more knowledge we have, the humbler we are to be. Jesus, the all-knowing, ever-present God is the ultimate example of this. In Phil. 2:6

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

The one who is more mature always humbles himself to those less mature – that's the biblical model that Paul presents here:

The more mature need to relinquish their rights (vv.7-10)

Since not everyone has the same biblical knowledge, those with more knowledge are always to serve those with less. Not use their knowledge to make others feel inferior. This is the Jesus way. If you've been a believer for a long time and you've never figured this out, is it because the knowledge you've collected over the years has only informed you and not transformed you? If you study the bible to gain information only, are you even growing spiritually? To grow spiritually is to go Spiritually. Jesus says He's just like me. Maybe what we sometimes have thought was spiritual growth was intellectual growth only, which rarely transfers into growth in humility.

Eating food or not eating food sacrificed to idols doesn't bring you closer to God (v.8) – the issue in Paul's day. Same as the issues we wrestle with. It's not about the issue. The issues don't bring us closer to God; humility and love do. Some were not getting this point and were eating meat sacrificed to idols because it was their right. 'And too bad for those less mature who haven't arrived like we have'. So Paul issues a strong warning;

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak

Paul uses the same language Jesus used in Matt. 24:4 when He said,

"Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

Watch out or be careful is a strong warning not to use your freedom about an issue to cause someone unsure about that issue yet to sin against their conscience because they are following your example out of pressure. Paul says we sin when we deliberately push our opinions/convictions/freedoms about issues on others who have yet to come to the same conclusion, even if we are biblically right, we may be spiritually wrong.

¹¹ So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is **destroyed** by your knowledge. ¹² When **you sin** against your brothers in this way and **wound** their weak conscience, you **sin against Christ**. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

Paul warns us again,

When the more mature cause a less mature brother to sin they sin too (vv.11-13)

When **you sin** against your brothers in this way and **wound** their weak conscience, you **sin against Christ**.

Why? Because we're destroying a fellow believer for whom Christ died. Knowledge puffs up and destroys while love, deferring our rights for the growth of others, builds up.

I love studying and learning the Scriptures but I don't grow Spiritually unless what I've learned changes me to be more like Jesus. Listen to how Paul prays for believers:

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God

He prays that our love would abound through knowledge so that we're able to discern the best way to be pure and blameless. Truth transforms not just informs.

Col. 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

How do we bear fruit? How are we filled with the knowledge of God's will that gives us spiritual wisdom? As we grow in the knowledge of God.

The Bible is not meant to inform us only but to transform us internally. To make us more like the author, Jesus by the Spirit. Knowledge without love results in arrogance and hurting people – even those for whom Christ died. We all have strong opinions on no-biblical issues, that sometimes almost become a test of fellowship. We also have strong convictions about biblical truths that we don't always agree on.

Back in Ch. 6 when Paul confronted these believers about taking each other to court, he rebuked them for their spiritual immaturity for not settling these issues themselves. He even said 'choose to be wronged' to keep peace. The issue is not the point; the real issue is are we going to love each other like Jesus?

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If you have any comments or questions about tis message please
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