

“What’s the big deal with knowledge?” 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 by Vicar David Spaude Feb. 17, 2019

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

⁴So 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. ⁵For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), ⁶yet 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. ⁷But 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. ⁸But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

⁹Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For 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? ¹¹So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹²When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, 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.

This is the word of the Lord.

In the name of Jesus, dear Fellow Believers.

There is a career for just about any able individual to pursue. There is an education for just about any interest. And there is a certain amount of *knowledge* necessary for just about any situation.

In the readings for the service today we know that God values spiritual blessings over physical ones. In response to God’s love *we* also do our best to value spiritual blessings over physical ones. This is especially applicable when we deal with things neither commanded by God that we should do nor forbidden by him that we should not do. Should or should not the pastor wear a robe during the worship service? Should or should not Christians only worship on Saturday, the Old Testament day of worship? Should or should not baptisms happen by completely immersing the individual in water? These are areas of life God has not commanded nor forbidden us what to do, but gives us the freedom to choose what to do as we value spiritual blessings over physical ones.

In the Apostle Paul’s day the question was, “Should or should not a Christian eat meat that is sacrificed to idols?” Paul helped the Corinthian Christians to know how to act in those situations. We can use Paul’s words to help us value spiritual matters over physical ones in situations where God has neither commanded nor forbidden us what to do. So the basic question for today is, “What’s the big deal with knowledge?” Let’s hear God’s answer.

Corinth is still around today. It’s located in south-central Greece about 50 miles west of Athens. Ancient Athens was known for great ideas of philosophy and wisdom. However, idol worship was common there and influenced the Corinthians. Certain animals were sacrificed to idols or “gods.” Some parts of the animals were eaten. Some Corinthians wondered if this eating was an act of sacrifice to false gods and they were troubled. Did they need to be? No. It didn’t affect their closeness to God.

The prophet Isaiah wrote there is one God (45:5) and the apostle Paul wrote in another part of Scripture that food sacrificed to idols are actually sacrificed to demons (1 Co 10:20). Paul was correct when he said in today's sermon text that idols are not gods, but there is only one God (v4).

The unfortunate reality is that many people during Paul's time were deviating from God's Word. They believed there were many "gods" and many "lords." Paul knew there aren't "gods" and "lords" because God had given him faith to believe "there is but one God, the Father . . . there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ" (v. 6). So what's the big deal with his knowledge? Well, he also knew that there is one God for whom we live and one Lord through whom we live (v. 6). The big deal with knowledge is that he and we learned this knowledge from Scripture.

The battle against idols present in Paul's day continues today. You know of Buddha, but know of so many other idols – money, riches, wealth, guns, automobiles, homes, property, fame, sports, and many more examples that take the place of God in our lives. Do we live primarily for these idols like the heathens who surrounded the Corinthians did? Do you have an idol? Could it be your family? Could it be yourself? Know what your idols are. Turn from them and to God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom you live.

Paul says, "There is one Lord, Jesus Christ . . . through whom we live" (v. 6). Jesus made himself like us except he had no sin. He suffered the punishment you and I deserve for our sins and rose victoriously from the grave to secure eternal life for you and for me. In fact, he has claimed us as his very own as Paul said to the Romans and says to us, "[W]hether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (14:8). Let this knowledge lead you to live to the glory of God.

What's the big deal with knowledge? The big deal is that you learn from Scripture there is only one God for whom you can live. He desires that you give him glory and use your Christian freedom in a way that values spiritual blessings over physical ones.

Some Corinthians were not using their Christian freedom of eating delicious and sustaining meat sacrificed to idols in a way that values spiritual blessings over physical ones. Some of the meat was eaten in a solemn temple meal. Strong believers in the Corinthian congregation had no problem eating the meat sacrificed to idols. They knew that it was not forbidden by God, but they were so proud of their knowledge they let themselves be puffed up by it. It was like they were saying, "I'm better than the Christians around me weaker in their faith because I know God allows me to eat this and I feel great about it." So Paul reminded them of the principle that love builds up (v. 1). The goal for the body of believers is to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). The strong Corinthian Christians didn't quite understand this.

Paul warned them that their knowledge could be a danger to the weak Christians among them. He said, "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (v. 9). Have you ever tripped on something? Maybe it was a crack in the sidewalk or a step. The spiritual knowledge of the strong Corinthian Christians who were eating meat sacrificed to idols was a crack in the sidewalk, a step, or a "stumbling block" to the weak Christians among them. Paul said a weak Corinthian Christian who sees a strong Corinthian Christian eating food sacrificed to idols would be led to do likewise (v. 10). We might think the weak Corinthian Christian would look at the strong Corinthian Christian with disgust after seeing them eat meat they wanted no part of, but that's not the worst part. Paul said this weak Christian might act against his conscience, endangering his salvation (v. 11). Martin Luther wrote, "In heaven and on earth there is nothing more tender than the conscience, and nothing less able to tolerate abuse. It is said that the eye is tender, but the conscience

is much more tender and soft. That is why we note in the apostles again and again how gently they have dealt with the conscience.”

Paul’s response to this misuse of Christian freedom so that he values spiritual blessings over physical ones is this: “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” (v.13). Paul is saying to Christians of all time: “Do not enjoy the pleasure and benefits of something that’s neither commanded nor forbidden by God, if enjoying that thing will cause weak Christians to act against their conscience.”

Is there someone in your life who abstains from something that is neither commanded nor forbidden by God? Whatever it is, maybe you have led them to act against their conscience, knowingly or unknowingly. That was a stumbling block for them. Repent of that sin against them and against Christ (v. 12).

You may try to remove that stumbling block from their life, but accidentally drop another in their path. Remember that Christ removed the biggest stumbling block for all people. He removed the guilt and punishment for their sin including yours with his work of salvation. When you fall into sinning against your neighbor or against Christ you might feel like a bruised reed – flimsy and weak – or you might feel like the smoldering wick of a candle – about to go out and have no hope for the future. But Jesus does not hold your sin against you. He has paid it in full. He will not break you or leave you with no hope of a future, but he will build you up, strengthen and restore you through his work of salvation.

Christ has died not only for you, but also for your Christian brothers and sisters. Your goal is to keep this wonderful knowledge in front of them and to remove those things that might cause them to stumble, right? You might remember how the Apostle Paul strove to become “all things to all people so that by all possible means [he] might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Without sinning, Paul “tweaked” the way he acted around those he was with because he wanted to remove those things that cause others to stumble so that the Holy Spirit could strengthen their faith. Use your Christian freedom in love for your Christian brothers and sisters so that you do not become a stumbling block for them and so that the Holy Spirit may strengthen their faith.

In 2005, Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, was asked by an ESPN reporter why he rode his motorcycle without a helmet. Ben said, “I don’t wear a helmet because I don’t have to. It’s not the law. If it was the law, I’d definitely have one on every time I ride. But it’s not the law and I know I don’t have to. You’re just more free when you’re out there without a helmet on.” Ben unfortunately totaled his motorcycle in an accident with a vehicle about one year after that interview. In a seven-hour surgery he got repairs to his broken jaw, fractured skull, missing teeth, and other facial injuries.

After going home, Ben apologized to his fans, family, and team for not wearing a helmet and not preventing the head injuries he suffered. He was no longer focused on taking advantage of his individual freedom. In a subsequent interview he said, “In the past few days, I’ve gained a new perspective on life. By the grace of God, I’m fortunate to be alive. If I ever ride a motorcycle again, it will certainly be with a helmet.”

Ben had freedom and knew the dangers in taking advantage of that freedom. We know that we have Christian freedom to use our spiritual knowledge and know that there are dangers with taking advantage of it. That’s the big deal with knowledge. We learn from Scripture that God is the one person for whom we live. As we live for him we use our knowledge in love as we value spiritual blessings over physical ones especially in our interactions with each other. Amen.