

Love Trumps Knowledge

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 April 2019

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 00] Now concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge. This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

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. For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 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.

However, not all possess this knowledge, but some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

[1 : 27] For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?

And so by your knowledge, this weak person is destroyed. Read, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their consciences when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Amen.

This is God's word. Lord, let's pray together before we turn to study this. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can take a break from our week and come together this lunchtime to have fellowship with other Christians or to inquire about the Bible, maybe for the first time.

We do pray that as we open up this passage that you will be with us, that you'll help us to understand and to submit to you and to follow you. So be with us now, we pray in Jesus' name.

[2 : 44] Amen. I grew up as a young child on all sorts of puzzles and games that involved pens and paper. None of these high-tech gadgets and things like that.

One of them was the classic old dot-to-dot or join-the-dots, whatever you would call it. It was simple. You had to look for the dot that had a little one beside it, and you put your pencil on that, and you drew a line straight to where it said number two, and all the way on until you got to the last dot.

A seemingly random collection of dots revealed Donald Duck or Scooby-Doo or something like that. The same line passed through the whole picture to reveal what was really there.

And in the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul is drawing a picture with the same line throughout it. At every turn in this big letter, we find the absolute importance of the cross of Christ and Paul's pattern of ministry that's so completely shaped by the cross of Christ.

And throughout this letter, there's a contrast between Paul's pattern of ministry and the Corinthians' pattern of ministry. Paul's pattern is faithful to both the preaching of the cross and to living the life that is marked in a costly way in this world's eyes by the weakness and foolishness of the cross.

[4 : 08] Paul's pattern was cross now and glory to come. Cross now and resurrection to come. So in this world, Paul is characterized by words like foolish, weak, dishonor.

But the Corinthians, however, they'd begun to move on from Paul. They thought they were better than Paul. They're marked by glory now, resurrection now.

In their minds, they had become spiritual kings. And so the kind of words that describe them throughout this letter are words like wise, honored, powerful.

They were marked with spiritual-looking gifts or abilities. They lived now, or so they thought, with the great victory of resurrection.

And so this line runs through the whole letter where we see the contrast between the Corinthians and Paul. It can be traced from chapter to chapter, from issue to issue. It cannot be escaped.

[5 : 15] And because the Corinthians have diverged from Paul, they have tiers of spirituality in the church. They draw a line through the church that separates the superior Christians from the weak ones.

But Paul, on the other hand, he draws the line around the church. And he says that all Christians, all Christians have been enriched by Christ so that none are lacking.

And so this issue plays out in all manner of differences between the Corinthian church and the rest that followed Paul. Because Corrin thought of tiers of Christians, the special, the gifted, and the rest, they were divided.

They lacked love for one another. And so Paul tackles that issue early on in this letter. But then for most of the rest of the letter, he's dealing with how it plays out in various areas in the life of the church.

And so we're going to spend the next three weeks looking at one of those areas, food sacrificed to idols. That's what chapters 8 to 10 major on. Now, food sacrificed to idols seems like a very alien thing to us living in a 21st century Western world.

[6 : 33] But the principles that play out here are important for the church. And they're shaped by the cross and Paul's pattern of ministry that flows from that.

And it's also something that Paul exemplifies himself. That's why at the very end of this section on food sacrificed to idols, he says, be imitators of me. And so in chapter 8, he begins the argument by talking about love and knowledge.

So he says, verses 1 to 3, God knowing us is the knowledge that counts. God knowing us is the knowledge that counts.

Having a good grasp of lots of theology is no substitute or replacement for love. That means that knowing things are right and making everybody know that at the expense of love and care for other people is just not an option.

A truly spiritual church must be more concerned with love than knowledge. Winning arguments is not more important than the care of the souls of your church family.

[7 : 45] And in verse 1, we see what the Corinthians have been saying regarding this. Look at verse 1. All of us possess knowledge. This is likely a Corinthian phrase that they use about themselves.

They think of themselves as a wise church. The words wisdom and knowledge come up again and again all throughout this letter. And so Paul is quoting to them their own phrase.

But then he moves on to correct it. And so he says, he who knows that there's great knowledge in Corinth, but this knowledge that they have only serves to puff them up.

Their knowledge is used to show that they are superior Christians or supposedly superior Christians. This knowledge only serves to expand the ego of the Corinthian church.

It's all about boasting. It's all about pride. We, we're the ones who knew. Look at us. We have the knowledge. I'm sure many of us have come across people who like to point to their wonderful theology degrees or drop into conversation the latest tome that they've been reading.

[8 : 57] Probably written by someone with a name that you can't pronounce, never mind understand what on earth it's talking about. Or maybe you've just met someone who likes to argue with you about any little thing and put you down about what you know.

Paul isn't saying here that knowledge is a bad thing. In fact, he goes on to say in the next verses that actually the Corinthians do understand some true things. It's good for us to know as much as we can about God and his word.

But when that leads only to a pride that crushes other Christians, that is no concern for our Christian brothers and sisters, then it is harmful.

So Paul's response to all of this knowledge that the Corinthians have is to say that they lack love. He doesn't say to them that they aren't wise. He instead turns their attention to love. He says knowledge can puff up and make them think they're pretty special.

[10 : 03] But to those who've blown themselves up with this kind of thinking, Paul bursts the balloon because he says love trumps knowledge. Love builds people up. Love is constructive.

If you add love to knowledge, then that will be a good thing. So verse 2, to the one who thinks that he knows, the one who thinks he has all of the knowledge, well, Paul says he doesn't yet know what he ought to know.

If you think you're particularly wise and special, Paul says you don't know anything yet. But to the one who loves God, to the one who gets that we aren't special, to the one who embraces others that are like us and being nothing particularly special, to the one who knows that it's only through Jesus' cross that's flat in human wisdom, to the one who knows that's the only real value, well, look at what Paul says.

He says, then, you are known by God. That's the knowledge that's important. That's the knowledge that counts.

We don't need to have a PhD in theology to register on God's radar. Paul says, if we love God, then he knows us.

[11 : 31] And Paul goes on to affirm that some of what the Corinthians are saying is true. Verses 4 to 6, it is right that God is the only God.

Paul says, it is right that God is the only God. Paul quotes some more of the Corinthians' sayings here and agrees with them. So here we see knowledge, but knowledge that is right.

But in the last point that we'll look at later on, we'll see how love affects that knowledge. So the presenting issue here in this chapter is food sacrifice to idols.

And when Paul was writing this to the church in Corinth, most of the meat that there would have been there would have been sacrificed at the temple. A lot of the social activity of the day would have centered around feasting on this kind of foods.

Even the meat that would be available in the marketplace was likely to have been sacrificed too.

And now, there was a group from among the Corinthians who were moving away from Paul and they appear to be more than happy to indulge in eating this food on any occasion, at any time, in as much as they wanted.

[12 : 44] And their argument for this is that they possess this knowledge. They have a robust theological defense for what they're doing.

So they say, we can eat food because our knowledge tells us that idols are not real gods. God is still God and the meat still belongs to him.

That's what we see in verse 4. An idol has no real existence. It doesn't matter that food has been sacrificed to some man-made idol because again, verse 4, there is no God but one.

The true God is still the true God. There may be many so-called gods, verse 5, and even lords. Yet, verse 6, the only God that matters is the only one that is real.

God the Father who created all things. All things belong to him. And there's only one Lord who matters and that's Jesus through whom all things were created.

[13 : 56] So the Corinthians would say, idols aren't real. Food sacrificed to other gods is just food. There's no such thing as other gods. In fact, all the food, no matter what is done to you, it was created by the true God and so it belongs to him.

So the Corinthian spirituality will say proudly, oh, don't you know that we are now free to eat anything? We're kings with God. Everything is his.

All the cows, all the pigs, all the sheep, all the chickens, they belong to God. Just because they've been sacrificed to idols, it doesn't mean that they don't still belong to God.

So they would say, tuck into a juicy fillet steak, but if you really want to honour him, you would have it rarer. And they'd be saying, as wise, knowing Christians, we have freedom to do this.

And we might be thinking, that doesn't really sound outrageous, does it? There's truth to that. God does own everything. He has created everything. There is truth to this.

[15 : 06] I love that I'm a Christian for many reasons and one of them is the bacon roll. It's wonderful to be free to eat these things. But there's a greater issue tied up in all of this.

And that's what Paul's getting at. It's how do your decisions impact on the rest of the church? So it's okay to know these things, but what does that lead to?

And so that's where he finishes in verses 7 to 13. He says, love trumps knowledge. How we act isn't just governed by what we might know is okay and true, but we also need to consider how it will impact on other Christians.

Paul's headline idea at the start of the chapter was to contrast love and knowledge with each other. Knowledge is a good thing, but it can fill someone full of hot air.

It can create divisions between those who think themselves superior and the rest. Look at verse 7. Not all possess this knowledge.

[16:18] The knowledge that the superior kind of Corinthians have, not everyone has that. There are some who don't have this robust theological defense on the issue of food sacrificed to idols.

And so what's happening is that some genuine Christians in Corinth are being led astray. They're being corrupted by their old idolatry that they've left behind.

And the end result of this Corinthian knowledge is that some who've been saved from idol worship into the church are stumbling and sinning because of their consciences and because brothers and sisters are encouraging them to eat this food.

Verse 7. Some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol. They don't have the knowledge about idols and the one God and all these things crystal clear.

And their conscience being weak is defiled. The issue here is not the food. The issue is the impact on believers.

[17:28] Certain Corinthians think they're superior because they can eat the food. That's their problem. If they don't understand these things, that's their problem. They think that failing to eat the meat means that someone is inferior, lacking a good theology.

But the food does not mean any such thing. Verse 8. Paul says, We're no better off or worse off for eating the food or not. Food isn't what commands us to God.

Having the theology to know that the food is okay to eat brings the responsibility to love. That's the issue here.

It's what others think when they see you eating. Verse 9. Take care not to be a stumbling block to a brother. Throughout chapters 8 to 10, Paul talks about various rights that Christians have.

And we'll see more of that next week. But what he's saying here is that there are times when we can insist on our rights as Christians that only end up causing a brother to stumble.

[18:39] Paul talks in verse 7 and verse 10 and verse 12 about conscience. And the weakness of conscience can be in thinking that something is wrong that isn't.

So it could be that someone was brought up in a setting that taught them certain things about the Sabbath or about alcohol or about all kinds of things like this.

So take young Fred, for example. This young man seems to think for some reason that eating a Malteser is wrong. And you know that eating a Malteser is okay.

But if you encourage Fred to eat a Malteser, even though he still thinks it's wrong, then if he eats it, it's sin. Because he has knowingly done something that in his mind is wrong.

And you've helped him to do it. Look at verse 10. If the knowledgeable are seen to eat, then won't the weak be tempted to eat?

[19:45] So verse 11, all that your knowledge has done is destroy a brother. Verse 12, therefore this superior knowledge that you think you have, this knowledge that lacks love, all it has done has caused you to sin, not just against a brother, but against Christ.

Notice that Paul twice uses the word brother here. Paul isn't warning the Corinthians about a danger to some stranger. No, he's talking about brothers and sisters.

People who are tied closely to us because of Jesus. And this isn't the danger of a stranger just missing out on a nice piece of meat.

No, he's saying that the potential danger here is a Christian's destruction as they might knowingly be committing something that they think is wrong.

And so Paul is clear. His pattern of ministry, the pattern of ministry that embraces the cross, must be followed, verse 13. And the cross-sheet pattern of ministry is to deny ourselves for a brother if it stops him from stumbling.

[21:09] So Paul says, he will gladly be a vegetarian or someone who avoids Maltesers or whatever it is if it means that Christians around him would be living faithful Christian lives.

If he can help in any way possible to stop people stumbling, he'll do it. In chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, Paul told the Corinthians that through the cross, God has turned human wisdom upside down.

And it is the world's way of thinking that appreciates displays of strength and wisdom. That's worldly thinking, not Christian thinking. And those are the kinds of words that characterize the Corinthians.

These things separate the impressive from the unimpressive. But ultimately, they separate us from Paul. Because Paul's pattern was not to eat meat if it caused someone to stumble.

Paul knows that idols are nothing. Of course he does. He knows that he's free to eat the meat. But his concern isn't that people know how wise he is. No, his concern is that other Christians are protected from falling back into a way of life that would destroy them.

[22 : 27] The Corinthians would no doubt have looked at Paul and thought, how could he possibly be a real apostle? He changes what he does. He's not consistent. He knows what is true.

But for the sake of these weak brothers, he changes to help them. Oh, Paul. They'd say, we're kings in Christ. It's their own feeling that means they won't embrace all that they can have.

Why would we change what we do? We must be consistent. That's the Corinthian response. But Paul is consistent. He will do whatever he can for the weak that they may not stumble.

He'll do whatever he can to make the gospel clearer to Christians or non-Christians alike. Because he knows that love wins over knowledge.

People are more important than winning arguments. Our brothers and sisters' spiritual well-being is much more important than any of us insisting that our superior knowledge have its way.

[23 : 32] And so whilst the presenting issue is food sacrificed to idols, the principle is that we need to be careful with our freedoms because we don't want to cause another Christian to stumble.

So take, for instance, alcohol. Are Christians free to drink alcohol? Well, I think you'd be quite hard-pressed to answer no to that. But does that mean that that freedom should always be insisted upon?

So you have some people back from your church for lunch and one of them is a recovering alcoholic. Would you still open the bottle of wine and offer it a round? Or someone was brought up in a setting where it was just wrong.

Of course you couldn't drink alcohol. Would you insist upon them that they should? The same can be true with watching or talking about a film or a TV program that has things in it that someone would struggle with or would think isn't right to watch.

Or the same is true of something like buying things in a shop on a Sunday. There'll be difference of opinion on some of these things and you might know or think you know best.

[24 : 47] But the question is what impact will this have on my dear Christian brothers and my dear Christian sisters? There are all kinds of things that can cause people to sin.

to go against their conscience but that we're free to do. And Paul is saying we must be careful. But equally some people might appeal to this chapter as a way of making sure that they get what they want in church.

So some changes are going to be happening in the church and people appeal to this to say well no no this is going to cause me to sin. This is going to cause problems for me. But Paul isn't talking here just about things that upset people.

He isn't talking here just about things that people won't like. This is very pointedly about being careful to not lead other people to sin against their conscience.

And so what Paul is saying in this chapter is that a truly spiritual church is a church that lays down its freedoms on all kinds of things that are neutral for the benefit of other Christians.

[26 : 12] And the reason Paul says we can do this the reason Paul knows that we can do this the reason that Paul does this himself is because we all follow the one who laid down everything for the benefit of all Christians.

That's how cross-shaped this is. And so Paul is saying it is the mark of the cross that he won't let go of that is to be present in all areas of a church's life.

that is true spirituality. One that is prepared to sacrifice for brothers and sisters.

Let's pray. Father we thank you that we have a wonderful gospel we thank you that we have a wonderful Lord in Jesus Christ and we thank you that you are worth following and so as we want everyone we know to follow you to love you to serve you we do ask that you would help us to be flexible and free with our rights to do us best to serve your gospel and we pray this in Jesus name Amen Amen Bye Bye Bye Bye

Bye Bye Bye