



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: FOLLOWING CHRIST THROUGH CHAOS | 7.3.22 | •
1 COR. 8:1-13 •

MAIN POINT

If we truly love one another as Christ calls us to, then we will make the personal sacrifices necessary to ensure we are building up each other's faith.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What would you say is the biggest sacrifice you've made in a relationship with a friend or family member?

What caused you to make the sacrifice? What happened as a result?

As Christians and members of the body of Christ, we have to be aware of how our actions impact other believers. If we truly love one another as Christ calls us to, then we will make the personal sacrifices necessary to ensure we are building up each other's faith.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-8.

Paul identified a specific issue the Corinthians had raised in a letter to him. The issue here was food offered to idols. Purchasing leftover meat from the temple sacrifices was a common practice for Corinth's citizens. This practice, however, raised a moral question for some Christians. Were they participating in idolatry by eating the meat?

What are some behaviors that your peers often have questions or hesitations about?

How were some of the Corinthian Christians seeking to justify their decision to eat food offered to idols?

We'll see in verses 4-8 that these Corinthian believers knew that the idols people worshiped were nothing more than man-made objects; they weren't real. For this reason, they didn't have any issue buying the leftover sacrificial meat in the market. They claimed their knowledge justified their action. Christians do have the benefit of knowledge that God has revealed through His Word and supremely in His Son, Jesus Christ. However, Paul knew also that knowledge had become something of a code word for the proud and self-sufficient Corinthian Christians.

What did Paul mean in verse 3 that to love God is to be known by God?

When it comes to deciding what behaviors are appropriate for Christians, what's the first thing we should consider? Some would say knowledge: "What seems like the most logical thing to do?" While this isn't necessarily a bad place to start, it isn't

always the best. Here's the best question to ask: "What's the most loving thing I can do?" This makes our decisions relationship-based rather than logic-based. Think about Jesus. Did He most often operate out of logic or out of love? As Christ-followers, we're not required to understand everything. However, we are called to love God and others. This is what Paul was calling the church in Corinth to do—look at relationships, not just rules.

How might we tear down other believers when we exercise our knowledge without love's limitation?

When you make decisions, what usually comes to your mind first: being logical or being loving? Explain.

When love replaces legalism, we are freed up to focus on how people are doing more than on what they're doing. Choosing to operate from a position of love goes against everything this world teaches. It requires us to take a back seat and put others first. It requires sacrifice of personal interests in order to build up the faith of others. As members of the church, the body of Christ, we are called to display love in the same manner Jesus did. That's a tall order.

For Paul, what did idols represent? How did this truth influence the decision of some Christians to eat the meat?

What could the "knowledgeable" group of people have done to help those who were not comfortable with eating food sacrificed to idols?

Those in the Corinthian church for whom pagan idolatry wasn't an issue could eat meat sacrificed to idols without committing sin. The idols aren't real, the reasoning goes, and therefore there is nothing wrong with eating meat sacrificed to what does not exist. They were right, but not everyone in the church body had this understanding. In verses 7-8, Paul described other believers for whom eating food offered to an idol would be sin. These Christians associated the meat with past acts of immorality and unbelief.

How are the issues surrounding things like what we eat, drink, or watch on TV different than issues surrounding moral absolutes? What approach do you tend to take toward things that may fall into a “gray area”?

This passage not only helps us understand our strengths and weaknesses, it also instructs us on how to do life with people who are weak in areas that we happen to be strong. This is where personal sacrifice comes into play. We're responsible for how our actions impact others. Some people complain that this isn't fair, and maybe you agree. Why should we abstain from something we don't feel convicted about just because someone else is convicted about it? The reason, as Paul already emphasized, is love. When we truly love others, their relationship with God matters more to us than our personal interests.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 8:9-13.

Who did Paul consider “weak brothers”? Was he using this term negatively? Explain.

Knowledge or personal beliefs about meat sacrificed to idols defined those who were strong or weak in Paul's argument. The strong Christians saw nothing wrong with eating meat sacrificed to idols and did not sin when they ate it. The weak Christians were so used to idolatry that eating meat sacrificed to idols violated their moral beliefs. Should each be allowed to pursue their own convictions and ignore the concerns of others? Paul's answer was no.

Whom do we hurt when we insist on our rights, and how do we hurt them?

When we operate in love, we're willing to do what it takes to look out for our brothers and sisters. We strive to know each other well enough to know where we are weak and strong so that our actions don't become stumbling blocks for one another. This is why community is so important. Know your friends well enough to know what causes them to sin and stay away from that stuff.

Have you ever thought of your knowledge or rights as sin (v. 12)? When do they become so?

Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that God cared more about the attitude with which they ate than the specifics of what they ate. What is the attitude that pleases God regardless of what we do?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Do you know where your friends are strong and weak? If you don't know, what does this reveal about the areas in which your relationships need to grow?

How do we demonstrate with our actions that we consider the spiritual health of the body more important than exercising our rights?

How can you ensure that you aren't becoming a stumbling block to others?

PRAYER

Pray for love to become the defining characteristic of our group and our church. Pray that your group members will allow love to direct their actions and choose what's best as they make personal sacrifices in order to strengthen the body of Christ.

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13

8:1 Paul began by quoting a slogan of some other church members who evidently had no problems with the practice: “we all have knowledge.” He in fact agreed with the statement on its face. Christians do have knowledge that God has revealed through His Word and supremely in His Son, Jesus Christ. However, Paul knew also that knowledge had become something of a code word for the proud and self-sufficient Corinthian Christians. Some of them believed they had achieved a superior level of spiritual understanding. They saw other church members as weaklings.

Paul warned against believers’ misuse of knowledge. The Corinthians thought knowledge was an end in itself; Paul pointed out that knowledge by itself only inflates with pride. The Greek word for inflates literally means to puff up. It emphasized the empty and foolish manner in which these Christians claimed to have knowledge. In contrast, love builds up. Paul had much to say to these believers about loving one another.

8:2 A person who thinks he knows anything is engaging in self-deception when that knowledge is the extent of his or her efforts. Knowledge alone is inadequate for Christian living. Knowledge without godly wisdom can, in fact, be hurtful and dangerous. With knowledge alone, the puffed-up Christian does not yet know ... as he ought to know. In one sense, then, knowledge should lead believers to humbly admit how much they don’t know.

8:3 Love is the reigning Christian virtue from first to last. Whatever level of knowledge a Christian may have, the main reason for having that knowledge is to love God. Love is accessible to the youngest and newest Christians and must be the central quality of the oldest and most mature Christians. Loving God is not primarily about the amount of knowledge we have; it’s about whether we are known by Him.

8:4-6 The controversy was about eating “food offered to idols” and Paul paused in verses 4-6 to comment on what these idols represented. He reminded them that “an idol is nothing in the world.” The wood and metal representations of pagan deities

were fabrications by artisans of nonexistent gods and goddesses. Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 44:6-20) and other writers (Psalm 115:4-7) mocked the worship of man-made objects. Paul repeated the important principle of Deuteronomy 6:4 that “there is no God but one.” The worship of idols was in reality a worship of demons and Satan, who is the author of all false religions (John 8:44; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Revelation 9:20).

8:7 The Greek word translated “conscience” refers to “self-consciousness” and a proper understanding of the term is essential in interpreting this passage. Conscience is a part of people’s creation in the image of God and plays a vital role in the conduct of moral beings. Conscience serves as a personal guide and judge of conduct. Regarding past actions, it gives a sense of approval or disapproval. If we do something we believe is wrong, the conscience responds with conviction of sin. If we do what we believe to be right, conscience responds with approval. In order for the conscience to perform properly it must be informed by Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit.

8:8 Paul made it clear that he was not talking about an act involving an absolute moral principle. Absolute moral principles such as prohibitions against murder, lying, or theft can never be right. The consumption of food was different. Eating or refusing to eat food “will not make us acceptable to God.” Paul was agreeing with the Christians who believed they could eat meat sacrificed to idols. He did not, however, give them permission to exercise unilaterally their right to consume it. The Greek word translated “right” refers to authority or power (1 Corinthians 9:4-6,12,18; 11:10; 15:24). In this context it refers to the freedom of Christians with knowledge to eat meat sacrificed to idols without sinning.

8:9 After underscoring the principle of love, Paul applied it directly to a specific matter of conduct. The knowledgeable Corinthian Christians were right in their assertion that an idol was nothing (see 8:4), but they failed to take into consideration the views of other church members. By forging ahead and insisting on the right to eat meat that had been offered to an idol, they risked becoming a stumbling block to the weak. The term weak may refer to relatively new Christians. Another option, however, is that Paul intentionally used a term that mimicked the way the puffed-up Christians viewed any church member who was offended by their eating meat from pagan temples.

8:10 Paul explained that a weak Christian might see a so-called knowledgeable Christian dining in an idol's temple. Such an occasion probably was a social gathering involving several families as well as a way to use the leftover meat. The knowledgeable Christian might have participated regularly in these events prior to becoming a believer. As a knowledgeable Christian, the person saw no harm in continuing to participate in such meals as long as the idol worship was avoided. Other church members might disagree with this Christian's view. They might consider eating in the pagan temple as an act of tacit support of idolatry. But that scenario wasn't Paul's main point. Paul didn't reject the knowledgeable Christian's right to eat certain kinds of meat. Rather, he warned against the spiritually damaging effects of influencing other Christians with a weak conscience to engage in behavior they considered inappropriate.

8:11 Paul emphasized the mutual responsibilities of church members toward one another by reminding the so-called knowledgeable Christians they needed to value everyone for whom Christ died. Other believers may have different views and sensibilities than we do, but they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. The phrase ruined by your knowledge refers to stunting another Christian's spiritual growth, not to destroying that believer's salvation.

8:12 Having established the foundation, Paul minced no words. He taught that wounding another believer's conscience is a sin. Recall that Paul insisted love's aim is to build up others, not to wound them. If a certain behavior becomes a stumbling block to another believer, then selfishly persisting in that behavior is wrong. The sin is not only against the fellow Christian, it is against Christ because the offended believer is a member of the body of Christ. No sin occurs in a vacuum. Sin against even one church member adversely affects all members to some degree.

8:13 Paul's personal commitment was that he would forego eating meat altogether if his eating caused another Christian to fall. To Paul, the greater consideration was building up a fellow believer, not satisfying a personal desire for meat.