

# LIVING FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS

GOD'S GRACE FOR AN IMPERFECT CHURCH: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS · 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-13 · JUNE 16, 2024 · PASTOR MATT ERICKSON

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*"Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that 'We all possess knowledge.' But knowledge puffs up while love builds up." (1 Corinthians 8:1)*

## The Situation in Corinth

- Misunderstanding the gospel of the crucified Jesus
- Super-spiritualizing their faith and disembodiment of discipleship
- Misinterpreting Christian freedom as permission to do anything
- Confused about their 'knowledge' (gnosis) and believe they had "arrived" spiritually
- Inequity developed within the community (the 'weak' and the 'strong')
- All this relates to food sacrificed to idols in chapter 8

## The Priority of Love

- 'Knowledge' puffs up but love builds up (8:1)
- Thinking you know something when you do not know what you ought to know (8:2)
- Loving God and being known by God (8:3)

## The Importance of Building Others Up in Love

- An aside about idols:
  - Idols are no-things (8:4-5)
  - There is only one God, the source of all, and Jesus, the originator and sustainer (8:6)
- Knowing that we're not all in the same place (8:7-8)
- Exercising Christian freedom calls for discernment (8:9)
- We can lead others astray through our supposed 'knowledge' and 'freedom' (8:10-11)
- We can damage those Christ died for and sin against Christ at the same time (8:12)
- Therefore, my exercise of Christian freedom is curbed by love and building others up (8:13)

## Three Guiding Statements

- Loving what you know is empty without knowing how to love
- The great center of the Christian life is God's love in us overflowing in our love for others
- Christ makes us free from much so we can be free to make much of Christ

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you experienced someone extending small or great kindness to you when you felt weak or small? What happened?
2. This week we continue our preaching series, "God's Grace for an Imperfect Church" by

1. looking at 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. Whether on your own or with others, begin your study in prayer, asking God to speak to you through this study and then read that text aloud.
2. Background: With chapter 8, Paul turns to another issue from the letter exchange he shared with the believers in Corinth: food sacrificed to idols. The Corinthians believed they had received special 'knowledge' (Greek: gnosis) that set them free. But Paul needs to help them understand how their freedom relates to others, including their own community.
3. When you read 8:1-3, what stands out to you about the relationship between love and knowledge?
4. According to these same verses how is knowledge related to one's relationship with God?
5. In verses 4-6, what does Paul say about idols or false gods? Are they real or unreal?
6. What is essential for the Christian according to these verses?
7. With verses 7-8, how does the Christian belief about idols relate to people's encounter with food sacrificed to idols?
8. In verses 9-10, Paul connects the Corinthians' sense of their rights to Christian freedom with the impact eating food sacrificed to idols could have on the weak. What is that?
9. How does this relate to how Paul started his discussion of this issues in verses 1-3?
10. This entire letter is written to bring the Corinthians back to the power of the gospel of Jesus, the crucified Messiah, who showered us with selfless love. In verses 11-12, how does Paul say the Corinthians' supposed 'knowledge' work against the gospel and selfless love for others?
11. What is Paul's conclusion to this teaching in verse 13?
12. What is one thing God speaking to you personally through this study? If you are with a small group, discuss that with one another and then pray about what you shared. If you are on your own, write it down, pray about it, and share this with someone during the next few days.

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- Memorize the final phrase of 1 Corinthians 8:1, *"knowledge puffs up while love builds up."*
- While eating food sacrificed to idols may seem far-removed from our lives, take some time to consider what other issues that you face might be an opportunity to meaningfully let go of freedom in order love someone else in your life. Pray about it.
- Explore these additional resources:
  - Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*
  - Timothy Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*