

Sermon prepared for Grace Church on 1 Corinthians 8 on January 8, 2017

Grace Church exists to glorify God by **knowing Jesus and making him known** through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Our chief aim is to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ in our church, city and beyond, by proclaiming his gospel, teaching all that Jesus has commanded and worshiping in an environment of gratitude toward God and graciousness toward one another.

It is helpful to have steady reminders of who we are. That is why each week when we gather, either for Sunday worship or for our Grace Groups, the central point is to remind us of who we are in Christ, that by his grace we have been saved and called to life. That is also why we have this as our church mission and vision - to know Jesus and make him known. It is a reminder of who we are and how we are called to live.

This statement of who we are is not geared to gain us something - it is something that has been given to us. A mandate to live as a church in response to what Jesus has done.

I think it is like a child learning to spell their last name. As parents we don't just tell them our name and instruct them to spell it anyway they like. We remind them, many times, we explain it, the phonetics or how the name sounds nothing like it looks...

This is Christianity. Salvation and transformation by the grace of God, with reminder after reminder of how to spell it, how to live who we are.

We come today in our study of 1 Corinthians to another such reminder. That because there has been a radical rescue we are freed to live a new way. As we crack into chapter 8 today my intention is that we will notice that:

In union with Christ we can endeavor to live with humble love.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 “Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. [2] If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.

[4] 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.” [5] For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—[6] 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.

[7] 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. [8] Food will

not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. [9] But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] 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? [11] And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. [12] Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

The gospel getting into real life!

Now it has been just over a month since we last heard from our good friend 1 Corinthians - chapter 8 then is not on an island all alone. It follows the Apostle Paul's proclamation of Christ and him crucified as central to the life of the believer and the church, then his correction calling for unity among the church, invitation to seek true wisdom in Christ and the implications of the gospel for marital life and freedom from anxiety found in Jesus.

Now Paul begins to answer their question on food offered to idols. This is a section that will take us through chapter 10 as Paul call Christians away from idolatry and to care for those newer to the faith.

It is important here to state that this is for Christians. Like communion, these calls to a new way of living are for those united with Christ by believing in him. If you are here this morning and exploring Christianity, don't listen for tips to make your current life better but listen for the ways the truth of Jesus transforms lives.

At issue is the consumption, eating of foods that were sacrificed to idols, mostly meat. While most of us can't remember the last day we went without meat, in first century Corinth it would have been something you rarely had. If you were poor and had the chance to have meat for a meal it was most likely in a temple banquet hall after the animal was offered to whichever deity ruled the day in that place. Even in the markets, most of the meat available would have been what was left over after some portion was sacrificed to an idol.

The question then is, can those that believe in Jesus even eat this meat - will it taint the Christian or cut them off from salvation? Or are there no limits at all, and should believers boldly live their freedom?

I have never been invited to eat meat that was offered to idols. So this context may seem far off for us, maybe out of touch with our lives now in 2017, but the truth that Paul declares and the ways Christians are to respond to it land right in the midst of our experience even now.

Here we have a humbling truth and a model of humble love that follows it.

1) Humbling Truth

Paul uses the Corinthian's own slogans to warn against pride and declare the truth of God that humbles believers.

For believers there is nothing wrong with eating meat offered to idols because idols - little gods are not real! Our relationship with God is not determined by our diet - "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do." (8) This is glorious; because of the work of the cross of Christ, the standard has been met and we now have freedom to eat and drink... but there is a way of approaching this fact that can be harmful, that can lead to pride.

"All of us possess knowledge..." This is the know-it-all turned perfect Christian. This is the person who has it all figured out - there is nothing outside of their "knowledge" and they are prideful about it. They are puffed up - arrogant about their freedom - and it will tear down others.

"Even though they had right theology, in the sense that they said, "all of us possess knowledge" and "an idol has no real existence" (vv.1,4), their problem was that their good theology was not working deeply into their hearts... they became puffed up in their knowledge rather than understanding that the aim of their rights were supposed to bend toward love." Um

This arrogance then has them flaunting what they think is freedom, without love leading to destruction of other believers.

But Paul brings them back to the goal, to love, that which builds up... and the truth about who God is and who they are in relation to him is meant to humble the believer.

He writes that yes, we know that "there is no God but one." There are other so-called gods, those that are worshiped. Yet for us as believers, "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."

The humbling truth that there is One God - notice Paul is equating the Father and Jesus the Son, using the same description - this God is the Creator and we exist for his glory, through Jesus. Here is God, the King of the Universe; the center of all things - all things come from him - and "for us" for those that have faith in Christ, it is through him that we exist.

It follows the catechism question of what is our only hope in life and death - that we are not our own but belong, body and soul, in life and death to our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Our hope is not the apprehension of enough knowledge that we would become our own self-sovereign but that we live under the authority of another and when we believe in him all of life is his.

When we have this hope, it changes us. This is a letter to those “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Those being transformed by this good news of the cross of Christ. And it is meant to stir up in us love that builds up, that has us concerned with others.

2) Humble Love

Corinthians were not all that dissimilar from us. They lived in a context that made each man the master of his universe. Self-centeredness that that would discount the value of other humans and prioritize pleasure and personal pursuits above anything that might get in the way.

Our modern human reality submits to a few more rules about valuing other people but we are still self-occupied and self-indulgent. There is a firmly held belief that an individual has the right to do anything at all that he likes so long as another human being is not endangered or harmed...

But the humble love revealed in 1 Corinthians 8 expresses something vastly different than our cultural moment... it is a care and love for others that may require denying our self.

Paul writes that mature believers know we are not tainted or harmed by food offered to idols, we belong to God alone, the only true, real God. The only God that actually exists. Not all people though possess this knowledge - some having former associations with idols, can be wrecked by other believers consuming what they think has really been offered to some other god.

Humble love then is taking care that our right, our freedom when it comes to the morally neutral act of eating meat, does not become a stumbling block to weaker, newer believers.

In love we care for other believers by not leading them to discouragement or sin... to disbelieving the truth that has been proclaimed. It doesn't mean we stop teaching - it doesn't mean we don't challenge each other in our sin (this follows after the instructions for church discipline), but it does mean in those things that are not prohibited in Scripture we are careful to not use them in a way that abuses others in the family of God, those near to us.

When we try to think of current morally neutral things of freedom that could harm other believers, the church often goes first to moderate drinking of alcohol, and there is something there - but our issues with strong drink are rarely that they have been offered to Bacchus the wine god.

Maybe it might be my social media posting, where I want my opinion to be known but by posting I disturb the conscience of other believers... It is in areas where knowledge of theology has not penetrated my heart and life - preaching justification and value in Christ alone, then treating newcomers to the church on the basis of potential giving and success in the marketplace. Discipling young men in the importance of ministering first to their family then working 12 hour days or being engaged with my phone when I am around my children.

Preaching grace and having no patience for the people that can't seem to get with the program...

Treating single people in the church as if they haven't quite arrived to mature Christianity until they are married... or acting like the married couple can't quite contribute to the life of the church until they have children...

Each of these things and others is just like taking a bite of steak that has been offered to Aphrodite in front of a new believer who used to worship this goddess.

Unlovingly living as if we matter more than others, our preferences are all that is important, our freedoms are all that is to be cherished. In a world where you faith is private and personal this is plausible - it is just you and Jesus - but the Christianity described and instructed on the pages of the New Testament is corporate, it is a family, a community, caring for the one another among us. Not just those that being around grants some advantage in life, but those the Spirit brings to our family.

Paul models for us this humble loving care by saying, and living as all evidence suggests, he would never eat meat if it makes his brother or sister stumble. He calls us to pay enough attention as to not wound the conscience of others, those weaker in the faith.

The pursuit of freedoms without concern for other believers is even called sin - against fellow believers and against Christ.

1 John 4:19-21 "We love because he first loved us. **20** If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21** And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

To love and be known by God is the goal and in this love we love others enough to restrict our freedoms for the glory of the One who saved us not because eating or not eating will commend us to God but because we are already commended to God in Christ.

"Love will restrict itself for the sake of others... that is true christian love and that, Paul would affirm with equal fervour, is true Christian freedom." Prior

This begins for 1 Corinthians a trend toward chapter 13, the throwing off of idolatry that we would have real, lasting, genuine love for one another in the church. That we would worship in an environment of gratitude toward God and graciousness toward one another.

I hate this. This is so different from what I am naturally inclined to do. To care for the conscience of others? I have enough cares of my own! Deny myself? Are you kidding, I can find plenty of false teachers that tell me I don't have to deny myself, and that I should reject those people that hold me back.

This is so opposed to my personality. To speak words of grace to people instead of telling them how stupid they are. To gently guide and invite weaker believers in and give them a place to belong when my inclination is to surround myself with people that enjoy the same freedoms that I do.

Living in humble love is so opposed to “Yo” that more often than not I disregard it.

But I can’t read anything else from 1 Corinthians chapter 8. This is what the thing I claim has authority in my life calls me to and I “know” it is right and good to live this way. Is it just something to be bootstrapped and done begrudgingly?

We can only live this way, hope to care for others with humble love, because we are the weaker brother. “Christians are able to enjoy freedom because someone sacrificed his freedom on their behalf.”

Here is the God-man taking on the burdens and brokenness of others (us). Setting aside his rights to work the greatest act of redemption. To the point of giving himself up as a substitute in our place, to cover our sin and fully meet the wrath it deserved. This is the Good Shepherd that values every member of the flock, that protects, warms and brings home each one.

When we were at our weakest, unable to reach God by our works, racking up evidence against us in our disobedience and our attempts to be our own god; Jesus intervened and invited us to live by his strength. He unites us to himself. To live completely different, fully justified (made right before God) and with a view for those that he values, with care and humble love for each other.

The more we are reminded of this good news, the more we preach it to ourselves and each other, the more the Spirit works in our lives to empower us to live like Paul is calling the church to live. The more we will notice increasing humble love for other believers and even for those lost in pointless idolatry, that they would meet the real Jesus and be forever changed.

“Only by the transforming power of the gospel can the good of our neighbor come to mean more to us than our own rights and privileges. For in the gospel, Jesus himself gave up his own rights and privileges for our sake.” GTB

“love for Christ will lead us to cherish those he cherishes. As a result, we will take care to avoid doing anything that would interrupt the progress of other believers toward maturity in Christ...Like the Corinthians, we often ask, “What am I free to do?” But as believers in Christ, we are able to ask a different question: “What am I free to give up for the good of others?” Similarly, when we know spiritual truth as we ought, we will use it not to justify doing what we please, but to “build up” other people.” GTB

And it gives us the motivation to get back up and try again when we miss opportunities. It gives us the freedom to make things right with those we have wounded. Because the one that was wounded for us calls us his beloved.

“Only the gospel tells us that we are so free that we can give up our rights for the sake of another. Our identity is not bound up in self-expression - it is bound up in the ultimate self-expression of a God who is characterized by self-giving love.

The Son gave voluntarily; there was voluntary self-renunciation and self-abasement. The most entitled person gave up his rights for us. That is powerful...Once we understand this, we can properly consume the stuff of culture as something that points us to the gospel. Our rights and privileges in Christ are far greater than we can ever imagine. We are so free that it ought to make us nervous, and it should cause us to properly think of ways to use our freedoms for God’s glory.” Stephen Um

In union with Christ we can endeavor to live with humble love.

May it be so in us.

How can we walk 1 Corinthians 8 out in our lives? *Gospel Actions*

Be Humbled by the Truth of Christ - That he is God, the creator and sustainer and that he willingly gave up his freedom for you, that he shed his blood not because you had earned it or could live up to it one day but because he loves you. And in faith, by believing in him you now belong to him, safe and secure and given the purpose of living for his glory. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Let this humble you.

Love - Take this new life you have been given and spend it loving others that they would know and grow in Jesus. Find your ultimate freedom in setting aside your rights for Christ’s glory and the good of other believers. Walk this out in community, with others to remind and encourage you.

This humble love is the right response to the gospel and it makes us exactly who the bible says we are as a church.

“But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.”

Of books I have many and of knowledge I am beginning to learn. But the blazing center of my life is to love and be loved. To know but more importantly to be known. That the One from whom are all things and through whom we exist would know me and call me his own.